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NO. 41



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# CULT MOVIES

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# deep — inside — CULT — movies

**A** bit long in the eyetooth now, I've developed a Proustian obsession with the past, especially my own. The 1973 release of *The Exorcist* was a milestone which seems like only yesterday to me. It was an event of major impact to our nation. Vividly I can recall studying the letters column in *Famous Monsters* magazine and finding the young kid (it had to be), with the general impression that, "Everybody knows no one was ever REALLY scared by those old Frankenstein and Dracula films. But this new Exorcist film — this is TRUE terror!"

Ferry Ackerman ran the kid's letter, followed by a seasoned reply along the lines of, "Kid, you just would have had to have been there."

I was nineteen at the time, and that brief exchange defined the generation gap for me as much as Viet Nam protests, hippie lifestyles, or the '72 Nixon re-election.

I loved Karloff and Lugosi! How could anyone experienced and of any age actually believe those classic films didn't artfully arouse stirrings of chills and savoy dread? Anticipated, but delightful; even in re-runs!

But that was my personal taste, backed up by an authority figure the likes of Dr. Ackerman. The golden era had past before I was born. I recalled a critique of the *Life* magazine article by James Agee on silent screen comedy; the reviewer stated that Agee's whiz bang wordplay made young filmgoers nostalgic for a style of comedy they never experienced. Mr. Ackerman did as much for movie monsters.

But I feel like it's show-and-tell time coming on, and I really do want to share this *deja vu* experience I've just had. I wonder if anything like this has happened to any of our readers?

Leafing through the book, *Satanic Screen: An Illustrated Guide to the Devil in Cinema*, I'm attracted to the pages devoted to *The Exorcist*.

But what to my wondering eyes do appear? Author Nikolas Schreck proclaims *The Exorcist* to be a first-class cousin to any Keystone Kop Komedy. "I'm always astonished to hear how many viewers of *The Exorcist* consider it the most frightening film

they've ever seen. I've always found *The Exorcist* one of the most laughable presentations of the Devil on screen. Regan's demonic voice strikes me as absurd, the kind of spook-hoax effect trotted out by evangelists to scare their congregations. Most of all, one is struck by the triviality of the film's presentation of what is, after all, supposed to be Satan's most malignant expressions of evil. It seems like the Devil could come up with something more threatening to the social order than pissing on mom's rug."

Schreck goes on to quote Christian scholar Jeffrey Burton Russell as saying, "In *The Exorcist*, William Blatty presents a Devil who is stupid enough to choose to possess a little girl rather than a national government."

All of this was published before 9-11, so perhaps Satan has fine tuned his game, turned up the heat after a fashion.

As I read their words, I can't help asking, "How old are these kids, anyway?" Eventually the impression is given that they each have a number of decades under the old belt; but what they have to say is uncomfortable like the all-knowing child who assured us that Drac and Frank never frightened anybody.

In 1973, I was managing the Cinema Theater in downtown Seattle when *The Exorcist* premiered. We did have audience members coming out of the auditorium physically ill during the green vomit scene, and hysterical over the head twisting and exorcism scenes. Some felt they were possessed by demons merely as a result of viewing the film.

We set aside part of the lobby as a resting place for the disengaged, out as a publicity gimmick, but because it was necessary. A supervisor from the main office nearly fired me

when I let a shaken man, pale as a sheet, wander out the exit door and off into the city night as though in a trance induced by the film.

"If he walks into an oncoming bus in his mental state and they find a ticket stub from *The Exorcist* in his pocket, we could all get sued!" the big boss fumed at me.

After a while, being around the film four times a day, week after week, I began to fear the devil was hanging out at my apartment and was afraid to go home. All kinds of reliable grocery store tabloids told of husbands who thought their wives were from hell, shortly after seeing that damned film.

So now I'm told it was not real? The whole thing was a comedy? I suppose with every new generation of films, I'll hear that first voice whispering back to me that nobody was ever frightened thirty or sixty years ago.

Which brings up to recent times. *"The Passion of the Christ"* picture was real terror."

And indeed it was. They've stood the horror genre on its ear. To hell with Bram Stoker or even the Satanic Verses. Let's take *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, the Good News for Modern Man and turn it into the most anguished experience in 100 years of Cinema. (And they thought *Intolerance* had interminable reels of screen time!) Two Christmases back I saw *The Passion* and thought Mel Gibson had far outdone Herschel Gordon Lewis and Cecil B. DeMille, both at the same time.

So I throw up this question to the readers. Would *The Exorcist* and *The Passion* make a good, long horror double feature? Or would that be pushing the envelope too far? If not, then what's next? Ten or twenty years' worth of film evolution from now, what will some kid look at and tell us old retired folks, "At last, this REAL deal!"

In the meantime, *Cult Movies* contributors Frank Dello Stritto and Joe Wawrzyniak shed some light on this puzzle. As always, the reader is invited to comment.

*Michael Copner*

—Michael Copner,  
*Cult Movies* Spiritual Advisor

## THE FINAL CUT (2005)

Robin Williams portrays Hakman, a "cutter" whose job is to edit together the life moments of people. Through a biological implantation device, installed in the brain before a child is even born, everything is recorded until their deaths. Then, all this life footage is taken to a cutter where it's edited into an hour and a half "Rememory" for that person's family. Complications arise when he discovers that he has an implanted device, something that a Cutter absolutely cannot have. Because his parents died when he was young, they never had a chance to tell him about it (people are usually told when they are 21). Yet this enables him to set to rest a childhood memory he has, a memory which has literally shaped his life to what it is.

As this is happening, there is a political organization which opposes "Rememories" that wants footage from the job Hakman is now working on. It belongs to one of the businessmen of that company and it could cause a scandal because he was sexually abusing his daughter.

Hakman won't give them the footage, which is a moot point when it's all destroyed.

After a girlfriend (Mira Sorvino) wrecks his editing console, So now the only way they can get it is through Hakman's stored footage—but in order to access his Rememories they'll have to kill him.

*The Final Cut* is an intriguing, thought-provoking sci-fi movie that's entirely too plausible. —Reviewed by Kevin Lindenmuth

## THE EWOK ADVENTURE (1984)

I remember not really liking this movie when I saw it twenty years ago and upon re-viewing I still don't like it. It's not as horrendous as the infamous STAR WARS CHRISTMAS SPECIAL, but it's close.

Lucas probably thought it was a good idea to come out with this made-for-TV movie after RETURN OF THE JEDI when he should have just left those Ewoks alone. They're the most fake looking aliens in the entire STAR WARS universe, with those unblinking eyes, unmoveable mouths and baggy teddy-bear-like costumes.

A family (Father, Mother, Son, Daughter) crash lands on Endor and the kids are separated from the parents and have to find them. The kids encounter the Ewoks and the teenaged boy is reluctant to get their help. After fighting this huge "watch-dog" type creature they discover that the parents are being held by this giant called the Gorax. They must travel to the

mountains, an area where the Ewoks never go. In the lair of the creature they encounter a fake looking giant spider (you can see the cables holding it up).

There's an encounter with the giant Gorax that reminded me of JACK AND THE BEANSTALK, which I'm sure was its inspiration. The weird thing is, it looks like the actor portraying the Gorax is just wearing a mask—you can see his normal skin behind the clear-cut eyeholes in the close-up shots when he's looking at the caged parents.

*Ewok Adventure* still remains a bad memory... —Reviewed by Kevin Lindenmuth

## FEAR X (2003)

I really have no idea what this movie is about... it's more vague than a David Lynch movie—and without the quirky entertainment value. John Turturro (*Barton Fink*) portrays a man who is obsessed with finding the man responsible for his wife's murder. He watches



Phantom business. Ken trades in his white hat for a black ten-gallon mask, and voila', we have the Phantom Rancher. Now, at this junction contemporary viewers will most likely take a pass, having had no exposure to "B" westerns, or western pictures. One has to remember that at one time in Hollywood's golden history the western movie was a staple of the picture business.

The Phantom turns out to be more of a vigilante with a 'Zorro' mask than a supernatural rider. Ken Maynard's fury at the injustice done to him and his uncle kicks up the voltage of what could have been an average western programmer.

Dave O'Brien of *The Devil Bat* fame (the same year Lugosi's bat flew the Hollywood skies) turns in a solid performance, and Maynard's horse "Tarzan" proves he might be the best actor in the whole bunch. (Check out his home act!)

While not for all tastes, *The Phantom Rancher* is 61 minutes of B western bonuses, with acting and story evocative of its time. People who read *Comics* won't get this film! Available from Alpha Video ([www.oldies.com](http://www.oldies.com)).

—Reviewed by Jan Alan Henderson

## SKY CAPTAIN AND THE WORLD OF TOMORROW (2004)

*Sky Captain* is a highly stylized sci-fi movie, having the look of a 1930s sepia-toned Superman cartoon. In spirit it's a take on those early adventure serials such as *Flash Gordon*.

At this point is where we get into the

# Film, Video and DVD reviews

Right away, when we see the "Hindenburg III" dock on the top of the Empire State Building, we throw all realism out the window, which is fine, particularly when all the giant robots show up in Manhattan and storm the streets. Jude Law is the overly confident Captain and Gwyneth Paltrow is his old flame and love interest, Poly Perkins, intrepid news reporter. She'll do just about anything for a good story.

She finds out that scientists are being abducted for some mysterious purpose, which leads her and the Captain around the world. They do find the reason for their disappearances—and it involves a madman and a huge "Noah's Ark" type of rocket. It's located on an island teeming with prehistoric creatures, which gives a nod to the original King Kong, particularly when they have to cross over a fallen tree spanning a crevasse.

There's so many different things going on, so many cool images, that you just kind of go along with it.

Pure, escapist fun.

—Reviewed by Kevin Lundermann

## CURSED (2005)

This is one of the better werewolf movies I've seen, not quite as good as Eric Red's *BAD MOON* but better than *AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN PARIS*. Christina Ricci portrays a Hollywood publicist who is trying to juggle a new relationship and also care for her teenage brother. Their parents were killed in a car accident so she's head of the household. One night, during a full moon, they are in an accident on Mulholland Drive when they run into some kind of animal. They hit another car, which flips over and goes down the embankment. Just as they are about to pull the woman from the car, the werewolf grabs her through the window. They try to hang on to her and are dragged a ways into the woods, until they are forced to let go. But both have scratches from the creature, which means they are going to turn into werewolves. We see how the nerdy brother gains confidence through the new strength he's obtained and Ricci becomes less uptight at work.

There are some twists at the end as to who is the "good" werewolf and who is the monster killing people in the Los Angeles area, and you can pretty much figure who they are by the middle of the movie. The special effects, both animatronic and computerized are well done. This is one ferocious werewolf, sort of a cross between that seen in *AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON* and the *Wyle E. Coyote*

ones from *THE HOWLING*. *CURSED* also has a great beginning title sequence that puts you in the right mood for the flick.

Again, not the best horror movie but one of the better from the werewolf genre. —  
Reviewed by Kevin Lundermann

## BETTIE PAGE: DARK ANGEL (2004)

In the 1980s, Bettie Page was reintroduced to a new generation by among others, Cult Movie cover artist Dave Stevens. A treasure trove of Bettie material sprang forth on the landscape of fandom. Everywhere fans were offered all things Bettie, so a mystery icon was born. Still making no personal appearances since her retirement (if you don't count an interview conducted in shadow), *Dark Angel* tries to fit Bettie's life and modeling career into a mere seventy-five minutes. Now some might argue that 75 minutes of Bettie might be too much, but you couldn't prove it by her fans.

*Dark Angel* recounts Bettie's journey through modeling and acting, her long association with Irving Klaw and his Movie Star News. Most fans remember Movie Star News from ads selling photos of top Hollywood stars, and our favorite ghouls from shockdom. Most of us were too young for Bettie's pictures, and settled happily for rarities of Karloff, Lugosi, Chaney (Jr. And Sr.), Atwill, and Frye.

The problem is that the plot of *Dark Angel* appears to be a framework for the recreation of Bettie's film and still shots. Admittedly this is what Bettie is all about, but some of the surrounding scenes seem a bit rushed, no doubt due to budgetary and time restrictions. It's a shame, because this cast and crew are more than up to the task of developing this and any other story they should care to tackle. Paige Richards is stellar as Bettie, and Duke Flyswatter is most convincing as Irving Klaw. A bigger budget could might not have helped, insofar as the way Bettie's movies and still shots were done was NO budget!

So *Dark Angel* most probably captures the realization of the era.

Nice main title music from Chris Stein, and all the background music adds to the overall ambience of

this picture.

*Angel* is a must for hardcore Bettie fans, and a great introduction to the great lady's life and career, for the novice. Produced by Cult Epics on DVD.

—Reviewed by Jan Alan Henderson

## SAW (2004)

Not nearly as good as the weed of spouth leads you to believe. I think many of those who saw this hadn't been exposed to a great deal of horror movies.

The premise is that a "serial killer" abducts



individuals, confines them in a room—and in 99% of the cases has the victims kill themselves. The only person who escaped had to kill another person. The main story is of two prisoners, a doctor and a photographer. They are on opposite sides of a room, chained by the ankle. Right then you know what that saw is going to eventually be used for. There's also a side story of an obsessed police detective (Danny Glover) who wants to catch this guy. In various flashbacks we find out that he suspect-

# Film, Video and DVD reviews

ed the doctor of being the serial killer. We also learn how the photographer and the doctor fit in to the scenario. Granted, there are some tense scenes but there's far more talking. It kind of reminded me of *Cafe* (1997) to a certain extent.

My problem with *Saw* is that it seems very too familiar, is predictable, and the "surprise" ending is taken from a scene in *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*.

—Reviewed by Kevin Lindenmuth

## TIMERIDER: THE ADVENTURE OF LYLE SWANN (1982)

Fred Ward gives a typically credible and engaging performance as Lyle Swann, a hot-shot off-road motorcycle champion who becomes lost in the Mexico desert while in the middle of a motocross race. Swann accidentally stumbles across a top-secret government base that's conducting a time-travel experiment and gets transported back to 1877. Grimy, vicious desperado Peter Coyote and his two dumb, craven, greasy, unwashed scuzzball partners (marvelously played by the ever-grubby by Tracey Walter and an uncharacteristically nasty Richard Masur) want to steal Swann's wheels. Swann seeks refuge in a small, remote Mexican village. The God-fearing peasant locals think Swann is the devil incarnate. Only priest Ed Lauter and fiery, fetching femme Clair (the highly alluring and enticing Belinda Bauer) treat Swann with any hospitality and become his sole allies, protecting him from both Coyote's gang and a couple of hothemetic federal marshals (one of 'em is grizzled Sam Peckinpah movie regular L.Q. Jones). The fantastic premise is given a semblance of grittiness, lived-in plausibility thanks to the brightly conceived script, believable reactions the 18th century characters have to both Swann and his motorcycle, sound acting from a top-rate cast, and especially director William Dear's harsh, rough-around-the-edges, very dingy and fiercely unromanticized evocation of the Old West. It's this latter element of rugged, dust-under-the-fingernails filthyness historical authenticity which makes *Timerider* such an effective and engrossing sci-fi/Western outing. Former Monkee Michael Nesmith co-produced, co-wrote the screenplay, and supplied the lively, thumping, guitar-blasting, synthesizer-driven rollicking rock score for this interesting anomaly. The Anchor Bay DVD offers an excellent letterboxed presentation of this unsung fave, along with an engagingly candid William Dear commentary, two theatrical trailers, and a bunch of TV spots.

—Reviewed by Joe Wawrzyniak

## HITLER'S DAUGHTER (1990)

In this cheesy made-for-TV movie, one of three politically powerful women is actually Adolf's daughter, intent on continuing a Fourth Reich. Is it the ambitious wife of the incumbent Vice President (Veronica Cartwright), the TV anchorwoman (Melody Anderson), or the Vice Presidential candidate (Katy Lenz) from the other party?

A White House press aide named Ted Scott is given evidence that one of these women is Hitler's daughter and from that point on is running from his life. He's chased by German assassins and his girlfriend is murdered. There's lots of times he could have easily been killed yet he keeps on escaping, courtesy of the script.

I watched this primarily because of the exploitative title and because most "Hitler Horror" movies are a hoot. This movie met my expectations.

—Reviewed by Kevin Lindenmuth

## THE RAVEN (1935)

In 1963, I remember clearly there were two *Ravens* buzzing about my psyche. The new one at the time, with Boris Karloff, Peter Lorre, and Vincent Price, and of course the ravishing Hazel Court. Around the same time on *Wind Wind* Channel 5, a local horror program on KTLA Channel 5 (which had no host and played Saturday and Sunday afternoons) I was treated to the 1935 *Raven*. Along with bad Mexican TV dinners, and a pinch of imagination, I fell in love with Bela Lugosi's performance. I saw this film long before I saw what some genre enthusiasts would term its companion piece, 1934's *The Black Cat*. I consider these pieces (the first two Karloff and Lugosi teamings if you leave out their cameos in *Gift of Gab*) the yin and yang of the *Titan of Terror*.

The *Black Cat* is clearly Karloff's vehicle, while roles are reversed in *The Raven*, with Lugosi spouting delicious slices of Poe. Karloff's grunting gangster, Bateman, adds support to Lugosi's Dr. Vollin, who is an embittered genius till the very last reel. Lugosi's need for torture in his house of Poe horror in the aforementioned reel makes this a treasure of cinematic sadism. And oh, what a performance!

—Reviewed by Jan Alan Henderson

## CURSE OF THE LIVING CORPSE (1964)

Drive-In theater owner Del Tenney needed a co-feature for his *Horror of Party Beach*, and so this was rushed into production. Set in "19th Century New England," it borrows from Poe with a nobleman afraid of premature burial, apparently returned from the dead to revenge

himself on a family who ignored the terms of his will. Like so many Poe stories, it also seems inspired by a bit of H.P. Lovecraft.

Candace Hilligoss (*Carnival of Souls*) appears, and Roy Scheider makes his screen debut. When first released to theaters, audience members were required to sign a "Fright Release," but this entire film seemed released of containing even a single fright. Filmed in Stamford, Connecticut this has nostalgia value as a horror cheapie made at the height of America's monster craze.

—Reviewed by Dr. Frankenstein

## THE TOOLBOX MURDERS (1977)

Cameron "I'll act in any piece of shit for the money" Mitchell's already patchy schlock pic career hits its wonderfully lurid and repugnant all-time skeeziest gutter-crawling nadir here with his joltingly frantic, bug-eyed portrayal of a crazed, paritanical superintendent who gruesomely dispatches several "sinful" promiscuous harlot young women residing in a grimy Los Angeles apartment complex. This shockingly gross and disgusting scuzzball '70s grindhouse slasher gem reaches its sensationally sleazy high point in a protracted sequence showing porn starlet Kelly Nichols furiously masturbating in her bathtub prior to Cam brutally butchering her with a nail gun!

Tireless act exploitation feature cinematographer Gary Graver did the sharp, polished photography. The incredible down-and-out cast greatly intensifies the pic's singularly discomfiting slimy edge: onetime child actress Pamela Ferdinand (most famous for doing the voice of Lucy in several Charlie Brown cartoon TV specials), *Land of the Lost*'s Wesley Eure as Cam's equally demented nephew (I), and original *The Blob* heroine Aneta Corsaut. This vile, gritty, resolutely ugly and sordid classic wholly deserves its killer trash legend reputation. To top it all off, we even got a pertinent and provocative subtext about the fragility of innocence (as represented by Ferdinand's sweet, "pure" character), the impossibility of preserving said innocence on a permanent basis (Cam abducts Pam so she can serve as a surrogate for the daughter he lost in a car crash), and how innocence is inevitably corrupted and/or destroyed by the evil outside world (as personified by the "impure" women Mitchell on his self-appointed murderous moral crusade deems worthy of punishment through savage and untimely death).

William Lustig's kick-ass DVD label Blue Underground recently re-issued this baby, giving it the deluxe special edition treatment that it totally deserves. Presented in a sumptuous letterboxed transfer from a print that's in strikingly fine shape, this goodie comes complete with a lively, enjoyable, and illuminating com-

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mentary by the delightfully perky Ferdinand, Graver, and producer Tony DiDio (who all have positive things to say about working with Cameron Mitchell), the theatrical trailer, a TV commercial and two radio spots, a poster and still gallery, a very thorough and informative Cameron Mitchell bio, and a nice eight-min interview with Marianne Walters (a.k.a. erstwhile hardcore film tippline Kelly Nichols), who still looks quite lovely and talks about her demeaning part with surprising fondness (she actually went with her brothers to see the movie when it played at a local theater!).

—Reviewed by Joe Mawrzycki

## DOCTOR WHO: "GHOST LIGHT" (1989)

While most episodes of long-running British sci-fi series *Doctor Who* are enjoyable for their campy low-budget charms (rubber-suited monsters, anyone?), final-season episode "Ghost Light" is one of the few episodes that is watchable for all the right reasons. In this case, reasons to watch include the intriguingly complex story (deemed too obscure by lazier Whovians), the fine atmospheric attention to gothic Victoriana, and a use of music and camera movement that elevates this to the most cinematic of all television.

It's a story that combines the most dramatic elements of haunted house yarns, alien invasion plots and drawing-room pieces, as we find the time-traveling Doctor (Sylvester McCoy) and his female companion, Ace (Sophie Aldred), visiting an old English mansion at the close of the 19th century. It's a house whose master only comes out at night, and where a once-famous (but now quite delusional) big-game hunter wanders the halls, stalking ... himself. Oh, and the house butler is (literally) a member of the extinct Neanderthal people, and there's a hypnotized police constable who's been crammed into a dresser drawer.

While the above may sound like random weirdness, all are components of a neatly constructed plot. The Doctor and Ace get to the bottom of this mess, which ultimately concerns a beneath-ground spaceship on which the creepy gothic house was built. These plot developments (and scads of others unspoil here) all cleverly relate to the episode's theme of evolution.

The recent DVD release of "Ghost Light" presents the episode, as all *Who* home video releases are presented, as a serialized multi-part — the way it was broadcast on 'the Beeb' over several weeks in the U.K. That means head and closing credits appear before and after each installment.

This, unfortunately, will cause dismay with those viewers familiar with the 67m (roughly) edit used for broadcast on American public television. As was customary for all *Who*, the



The Doctor and Ace (center) question the strange inhabitants of a gothic mansion in the superb Doctor Who episode "Ghost Light."

installments of "Ghost Light" were strung together into one episode for US public TV, with credits only at the very beginning and end — none in the middle. This preserves some great, highly cinematic sequences — keeping them from being used as cheap cliffhangers.

Also the music track didn't seem to be mixed so overpoweringly high when "Ghost Light" was re-cut for American television. .

So if ever there were a *Doctor Who* episode that begged to be presented in its U.S. public TV strung-together form, it is "Ghost Light." Could this superior edit not have been included on the disc as a bonus feature?

Oh, well. The extras that do appear on the "Ghost Light" DVD are en-light-ening.

Unlike some other *Doctor Who* discs, all the supplemental materials here pertain specifically to the featured episode, and not merely to Who in general. In the 38-min doc "Light in Dark Places," much of the cast confesses to have been completely confounded by the intricate script, and composer Mark Ayres complains that the music is mixed "far too loud," and that it is "being asked to do things I hadn't designed it to do."

Deleted scenes and extended cuts of scenes are also presented amongst the supplements, and while the inclusion of these in the broadcast version might have served great expositional purpose, they would have destroyed the pacing. They were rightfully excluded.

—Reviewed by Mike Malloy

## THE PLOT AGAINST HARRY (1969)

It's a premise that anticipates *The Sopranos* by thirty years: examine the family life of a mobster (and by "family life" I don't mean that kind of family; I mean "domestic life").

But *The Plot Against Harry* skillfully pushes this premise in ways that *The Sopranos* has never attempted. It forces and thrusts family upon its reluctant underworld protagonist as a foreign (but growingly important) part of his life — something that increasingly takes his time as his criminal career winds down.

Here's what I mean:

Harry Plotnik (Martin Priest) finishes a prison stint and finds that his numbers empire is crumbling. Through a chance encounter, he bumps into his ex-wife and ex-brother-in-law. He goes into a legitimate catering business with the brother-in-law, and he becomes acquainted with the two daughters he never knew.

Harry awkwardly tries to fit in with his new (old) family, attending his daughter's fashion show, joining a social fraternity, and getting into other situations where a convicted racketeer would feel equally out of place.

Endearingly, Harry tries to be a good sport, tries to fit into this new world. That's the crux and charm of this low-key masterpiece.

Featuring great b&w photography of NYC (think Lumen's *The Pawnbroker* or Cassavetes' *Shadows*), *The Plot Against Harry* is carried by Martin Priest's perfect performance in the title role. Priest, who resembles a sad-faced James Caan, only had a handful of film and TV roles, but at least he crafted one thing in his lifetime that cannot in any way be improved upon.

*The Plot Against Harry* was produced in the late 60s but didn't receive any real exposure or distribution until 1989, when it was rediscovered as a "lost" film at festivals. It became an immediate critical darling. It is now available on DVD from New Video.

And as for our hero's last name, do you get it? Plotnik? Plotnik? Huh? Huh?

—Reviewed by Mike Malloy

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## ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FILM THEMES, SETTINGS AND SERIES

by Richard B. Armstrong and Mary Williams Armstrong, 2001, McFarland & Company, 225 pages

Speaking personally as someone who considers the entire body of cinema in terms of genres and subgenres, I have picked up several books that dissect the whole of filmdom along these lines. There was Jeff Bovin's *The Signer Book of Movie Lists* (1979), which contained such entries as "Auto Racing on the Screen" and "Movies with American States in their Titles." It was good for light reading at the bus stop but was neither organized nor comprehensive enough to serve as a reference work.

Then came Richard and Mary Armstrong's *The Movie List Book*, published in 1990 by McFarland & Company. Its sole purpose was to group similar films together in an organized fashion. Apparently very popular, *The Movie List Book* went to a second edition as a trade paperback at Betterway Books.

But now that volume is back at McFarland - expanded, updated, and with a new title: *Encyclopedia of Film Themes, Settings and Series*. With over 670 entries, it is the best book of its type.

The Armstrongs' encyclopedia has three types of groupings. There are lists of official film series - the James Bond films, the Dirty Harry movies, the Phantasm series, the *Ilsa* movies. And there are lists based on subject matter - disaster movies, films about pickpockets, movies set at summer camp. But most interesting are the lists that deal with the more mechanical aspects of filmmaking - films with acronyms in the title, films that pseudonymously credit "Alan Smith" as director, films that contained new footage when they aired on television. The lists are constituted with American films, foreign films, and TV movies.

Each list is annotated with a preceding mini-essay that cross-references other lists and, where applicable, mentions television series that fit into the subgenre (although TV

series do not appear in the lists themselves).

Readers will doubtless find omissions ("Hey, they forgot..."), and because new movies are always being made, a book like this becomes less complete with the passing of every day. Still, the *Encyclopedia of Film Themes, Settings and Series* is an excellent jumping-off point for any research into a particular cinematic subgenre. And one hopes that this work will continue to be updated and that future editions will be published.

Available from McFarland & Company ([www.mcfarlandpub.com](http://www.mcfarlandpub.com), 1-800-253-2187).

—Reviewed by Mike Mallay

## PSYCHOTRONIC VIDEO MAGAZINE

Michael Weldon, publisher  
4102 Main St., Chincoteague, VA 23336

Let me tell you about Mike Weldon and his *Psychotronic* 'zine. Let's face it; his in-

vention ad in *Psychotronic*. By accident or design, he waited until one day after our convention was over to go to press with his magazine, thus rendering our convention ad absolutely worthless. Now, any honorable individual would proffer apologies galore for his tardiness, and consider the transaction complete. Don't you think? But not so in this monkey hustle! Weldon wouldn't walk on, he zeroed in on me, demanding that I print a one-pager for his *Sucko-Tronic* mag. And just to show him that, at long last he'd met an honest man, I published his ad.

Thereafter I proceeded to never get a Thankyouverymuch, a comp copy of his rag, a phone whacking sex call from his girlfriend - NOTHING! Only the silence of the tomb.

And it only gets BITTER. He compiles such totally excellent checklists as the births of new fanzines and the deaths of old celebrities, but never once has he written a word about *Cult Movies*. Which means, I guess, that he HAS written us - off.

Come on, dude; you're still the king and you know it. I'll send you a smiling photo of me holding up a copy of your magazine if you'll print it in the next *Psychotronic*. Or, better still, wanna trade ads?

—Reviewed by Michael Copner

## Stuff to read

trial book was a breakthrough reference guide. His magazine picked up where *Famous Monsters* left off, fueling the desires of a generation of film lovers emerging into middle age, while serving as a rallying point for new younger fans. Mike's mag had the video player as an accomplice, a benefit *FM* never enjoyed. I've always thought of the coverage in our own maga-

zine as falling somewhere between those two fine publications.

But let me get all over this hot tale of being burned by Mr. Well-done, the publisher.

A few years back, when we were promoting our *Cult Movies* convention, we made an ad trade deal with Mike that couldn't have been more common or simple.

"Mike, run a full page ad for our upcoming convention and I'll return the favor by running a full-page ad for you in our own magazine."

Okay? Done deal! Weldon did run our

## LITTLE SHOPPE OF HORRORS

Richard Klemensen, PO Box 3107, Des Moines, IA 50316

If you're into Hammer Films of England, you'll know about this magazine.

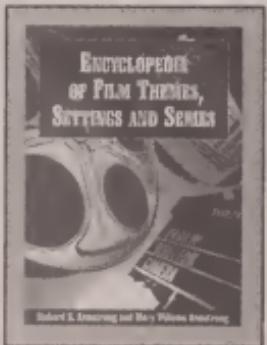
Reading an issue may inspire a thirst for Hammer. Each issue is hardly a magazine at all, but truly a book on the given film or theme. Issue 14 was a book devoted to *Brides of Dracula*, and was the best researched book on a Hammer film ever written. Another one was a virtual book on *Curse of the Werewolf*. Well illustrated, and a bargain. Read them all.

—Reviewed by Dr. Frankenstein

## PAUL BLAISDELL: MONSTER MAKER

by Randy Palmer, 1997, McFarland & Company, 304 pages

One usually remembers one's firsts for a variety of things in life. First dates, first proms, first communions, first baptisms,



# Stuff to read

first experiments (the morning after, as well!), and in the case of most *Cult Movies* readers, first exposure to horror and science fiction films.

This reviewer's first exposure to '50s sci fi was *Day the World Ended*, which I saw at the Oriental Theater in Hollywood, in 1957. In short, the movie scared the bejesus out of me, especially the mutant, played by the legendary Paul Blaisdell. I gotta tell you, Marty the Mutant, Blaisdell's nickname for his creation, gave me a severe case of sleep deprivation for about two years. He just kept appearing at my bedroom window. Later on, I saw *The She Creature*, *It Conquered the World*, and *The Beast with a Million Eyes*, which cemented this reviewer's admiration for the late Paul Blaisdell.

Randy Palmer's McFarland bio, *Paul Blaisdell: Monster Moker*, is the stuff Blaisdell fans have dreamt about for years. And why not? Mr. Palmer went to the source for this bio, which is a rarity in this day and age. Palmer has carefully and methodically retraced Blaisdell's life from his early years as a pulp artist to a makeup and effects wizard. Based on correspondence with Blaisdell, his widow Jackie, and long-time buddy Bob Burns, this volume could have been titled "Everything you always wanted to know about Paul Blaisdell and AIP's early years."

Mr. Palmer's pacing is thoroughly readable, and informative, and McFarland's own policy to include more photographs (especially Paul's artwork and first versions of many of his monsters), is a welcome change from their former policy of tons of text and no photos. There's an especially striking proof sheet from *The She Creature*, which contains candid photos, as well as production stills of the actors on location.

Palmer's writing is thoughtful, sensitive, and most obviously caring, and presents a fair picture of Paul Blaisdell's life.

Hughly recommended.

—Reviewed by Jan Alan Henderson

## HICK FLICKS: THE RISE AND FALL OF REDNECK CINEMA

by Scott Von Doviak, 2005, McFarland & Company, 222 pages

In college, I used to thumb through my copy of *Video Movie Guide* and see

descriptions for films that read "like *Deliverance*, but set in the desert" or "Deliverance, but with kinky sex." I realized there was a whole subgenre of *Deliverance* knock-offs, and I set about watching these movies. I also began interviewing the filmmakers — actors and directors involved with such movies as *Hunter's Blood* and *Backwoods*. Indeed, I became a scholar of what I call "Deriverance." (Though my definitive work on this subject has yet to be published.)

Thus, it was with great interest I read Scott Von Doviak's *Hick Flicks*, a book that not only covers the *Deliverance* clones but also moonshine pictures, tracker movies, honky-tonk biopics.

But author and publisher made some strange choices on this one, starting with the light-hearted pastel-colored cartoon on the cover (where one would instead expect a psychotronic film still of some crazy Dixie-fried hillbilly). And the foreword by *Film Threat's* Chris Gore asserts that *Citizen Kane* and *Star Wars* are — when you get right down to it — *hick flicks* (thankfully, Mr. Gore seems to have tongue in cheek while making these strange claims).

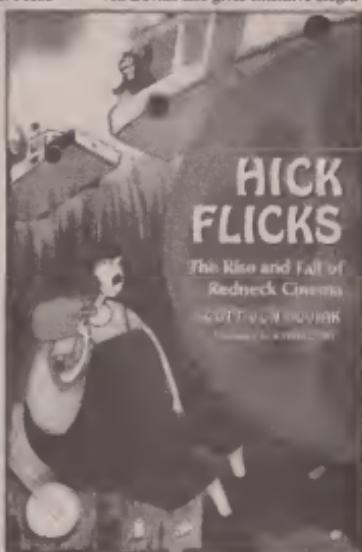
And the author's selection of movies for discussion is equally strange. I mean, what are the counterculture films *Vanishing Point* and *Two-Lane Blacktop* doing in a book named *Hick Flicks*?

Which brings us to the chapter that deals with the *Deliverance* subgenre. Called "Hillbilly Horror," the chapter is a total copout. Von Doviak watches a slew of these films in a 24-hour marathon, and instead of giving us any real analysis of the movies, he instead just offers a diary of his movie-watching marathon (and the diary seems equally concerned with the author's snacking habits and his dog's behavior than with the movies themselves). Worse yet, this very non-comprehensive marathon excludes important subgenre entries like *Just Before Dawn* and *Backwoods* in

favor of the already overexposed *Texas Chainsaw* series.

But when Von Doviak gets it right, the book is dead on. He nails the reasons that Burt Reynolds' moonshine vehicle *White Lightning* (1973) was a dead-serious, authentic slab of Southern action cinema, and why the sequel, *Gator* (1976), was a goofy waste of time (it must have something to do with that Reynolds moustache; he's only good when he's not wearing it).

Von Doviak also gives extensive biogra-



phical information to important auteurs of redneck cinema (I'm trying not to giggle as I write this) like Earl Owensby.

Inarguably, there is a lot of good information in *Hick Flicks*. It's just a question of how much of it belongs in a book on this subject.

—Reviewed by Mike Malloy

# Stuff to read

# Danger on the Road



Twisted truckers,  
murderous motorists,  
homicidal hitchhikers  
and other assorted  
roadside menaces



by Joe  
Wawrzyniak

I t's late in the evening. You're driving across some lonely, desolate stretch of backroads. You're weary and rundown from the lengthy trek you've embarked on. It's cold and rainy. You spot a lone figure on the side of the road with his thumb out. You pull over and decide to give the poor guy a ride. This will be the biggest mistake of your life, because said guy turns out to be some unshinged cuckoo with a nasty penchant for murdering motorists nice (and dumb) enough to give him a lift.

Moreover, if during your travels you wind up stuck behind a large, filthy, slowly trudging oinker of a van or truck, you best not decide to speed up and cut around it. If you do, you'll piss off the psychotic driver of said vehicle and he'll proceed to terrorize you for being so impudent.

And taking a time-saving detour in which you really deviate from the main roads is anything but a wise move as well.

Welcome my fellow film fiends to the basic scenario of your standard "danger on the road" movie, a nifty little thriller sub-genre where making a cross country pilgrimage proves to be pernicious, fraught with scares, and above all ill-advised.

## Detour (1945)

Dir. Edgar G. Ulmer

This is the ne plus ultra of "danger on the road" \$1.50 mid-40s film noir poverty-row thrillers, shot on the cheap entirely in the studio in only six days by dimwitted cinema ace Edgar G. Ulmer.

Chronic loser Tom Neal hitch-hikes from New York to California to reunite himself with his girlfriend. When the kindly motorist who gives him a ride suddenly dies Neal foolishly decides to steal the dead guy's clothes, wallet, and automobile. Things go from bad to worse when Neal makes the even more fatal and catastrophic error of picking up venomous femme fatale Ann Savage.

Equally fatalistic and nihilistic in tone, a short'n'sweet running time, and lotsa blatantly crummy rear-projection, this is one of the few films where its conspicuous paucity of budget and polished production values qualify as an asset rather than a drawback, keeping things so uncomfortably spare and squashed that the overwhelming gloom-doom mood takes hold right from the start and never loosens its clammy grip to the literal bitter end. In a remarkable instance of life imitating art, Neal actually wound up going to prison for killing his own wife in a jealous rage.

## The Devil Thumbs a Ride (1947)

Dir. Felix Feist

Another \$1.50 rough'n'umble '40s film noir gem that actually benefits from its minimal budget and abbreviated running time. This one

relates in 63 tension-packed minutes the scary tale of ruthless highway bandit Lawrence Tierney, a "slaphappy bird with a gun" who commits robbery and two murders before hitching a ride from amiable inebriated motorist Ted North. The cops close in so this can nab Tierney before he gets away to kill again. Although a bit too talky and contrived, this RKO second feature still makes the cut, thanks largely to the inspired casting of tough guy supreme Tierney (a real-life bad-ass dude who had his fair share of run-ins with the law) in a part that's tailor-made for his formidable brand of mean'n'murky celluloid menace.

## The Hitch-Hiker (1953)

Dir. Ida Lupino

Gilbert Bowen (finely played by Frank Lovejoy) and Roy Collins (the equally excellent Edmond O'Brien) are two pleasant working-class family men out on a fishing trip, driving across Mexico in a Plymouth Fury. The two life-long friends make the fatal mistake of picking up Emmett Till (gaunt-faced character actor William Talman; the DA who inevitably lost every case to Raymond Burr on *Perry Mason*), a cold-hearted-on-the-lane psychopathic criminal who takes the pair hostage and makes them transport him across the border with the intent of killing both men after they prove no longer useful. Gilbert and Roy's friendship gets put to the ultimate test by Till: they either will pull together to defeat him or both wind up dead.

A gripping low-budget '50s stripped-down-to-the-scrappy-bare-essentials film noir thriller which delivers 71 minutes worth of sweat-inducing white-knuckle intensity, this "danger on the road" classic benefits greatly from Ida Lupino's trim, focussed, unflashy direction (Lupino also co-wrote the compact script), the nervy interplay between the three outstanding leads, Leigh Stevens' marvelously brooding'n'bombastic score, no needless pretense or sentiment to speak of, and a grim tone that's firmly rooted in a quietly unsettling evocation of fragile, all-too-easily ripped asunder everyday tranquility and banality.

The film's marrow-freezing plausibility no doubt derives from the fact that the story was inspired by a real life incident: In 1950 a hoodlum fugitive named William Cook posed as a hitch-hiker and killed four people who gave him a lift before the police caught him.

## The Sadist (1963)

Dir. James Landis

Hopelessly geeky '60s camp flick icon Arch Hall, Jr. gives a shockingly good and uninhibited performance as a cruel, inhumane and irredeemable Charles Starkweather-type white trash psycho teen who, along with his ditz girlfriend (smoldering brunette Marilyn Manning) terrorizes a trio of whimpering teachers who wind up

stranded in an isolated desert automotive junk yard at the mercy of our terrible twosome when their car breaks down while en route to a Dodgers game in Los Angeles.

Handsome shot in stark b&w by ace future Oscar-winning cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond (*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*), punctuated with startling outbursts of ferociously raw violence (Hall, Jr. shoots the oldest teacher right in the face!), and related in a no-fills style by writer/director James Landis, this hard-edged jewel definitely deserves its sterling cult reputation. Hall, Jr. also portrayed the leader of a gang of roadside car thieves in the fun juvenile delinquent item *The Choppers* while Starkweather's notorious exploits were more directly addressed in Terrence Malick's estimable *Badlands*.

## Hitchhike to Hell (1967)

Dir. Irv Berwick

A delectably cheesy cheapo late-60s psycho howler. Bespectacled dweeb Howard (wildly overplayed to the bug-eyed bait by Robert Griﬃn) drives a delivery van for the local laundromat service. While making his daily rounds, Howard picks up stay runaway teenage lady hitch-hikers and brutally bags them (his victims include a token gay guy, a little girl whose corpse Howard leaves in a dumpster, and one hapless less Howard struggles with a wire coathanger!). Ineﬀectual police captain Shaw (stifly essayed by Russell Johnson, the professor on *Gilligan's Island*) tries to catch Howard, but thanks to indifferent parents this proves to be a most difficult task to accomplish. Sporting suitably shoddy neck'n'dime production values, uniformly atrocious acting, and a gloriously godawful country-and-western theme song, this grubby gem was released by Harry Novak's Box Oﬃce International Pictures on a drive-in double bill with the similarly scroungy *Kidnapped* Cond.

## And Soon the Darkness (1970)

British, Dir. Robert Fuest

Petite, adorable '70s scream queen Pamela Franklin (*The Legend of Hell House*) and buxom blonde Michele Dotrice make for appealing damsels in distress as a pair of spunky young nurses enjoying a bicycling jaunt across the peaceful French countryside. They wind up being stalked and terrorized by a murderous sexual psychopath.

Directed in unusually plain fashion by the often quite stylish and baroque Robert Fuest (who also helmed the wickedly enjoyable *Dr. Phibes* films and the gloriously gaudy all-star abortion *The Devil's Rain*), written in a briskly efficacious manner by esteemed *Avengers* screenwriter Brian Clemens, and brooding with a clammy, suffocatingly claustrophobic mood, *And Soon the Darkness* certainly does the trick

as a creepy effective women-in-jeopardy thriller. The bucolic rustic setting, sparsely populated by gruff, intimidating local yokels and vaguely sinister cops, comes across as a very eerie and unsettling remote rural area, due largely to Fuest's cunning marked emphasis on tight close-ups, the ingenious decision to have the whole movie occur in bright daylight, and the notable absence of wide-angle panoramic shots. The twist ending is a real gut-rippin' corker. Why, this top-drawer chiller diller is scary and upsetting enough to turn even the hardiest fright film fan into a stay-behind-locked doors agoraphobic shut-in.

## Duel (1971)

Dir. Steven Spielberg

Substantially more than just the definitive man vs. machine movie (although this aspect of the film has acquired more stinging resonance because of our current reliance – hell, debatable overdependence – on technology), this groundbreaking "danger on the road" landmark follows a meek, spineless businessman (played to the sweaty hilt by Dennis Weaver in a performance that's all raw nerves and disbelieving wide-eyed stares) in his tiny red car as he's being forced to engage in a do-or-die face-off with a human-gone-ruin truck.

The truck itself – filthy, enormous, vicious and relentless to the point where it can't be dissuaded or reasoned with – truly represents adversity at its most unspuriously harsh and malevolent. Otherwise, why else would the truck driver blow his horn before demolishing the phone booth when Weaver makes a desperate attempt at calling the police so they can handle the problem for him? Surely, the truck driver wants Weaver in his car on the road so he and Weaver can carry out a mano-a-mano – no, scratch that, car-to-truck – showdown in order to prove who's made of sturdier stuff. (It's also possible that the truck is just an imaginary product of Weaver's repressed id.) Okay, one can further interpret this as road rage taken to its most brutal extreme, or as a modern update on that classic Darwinian kill-or-be-killed survival-of-the-fittest bit.

Naturally, none of this would register as strongly as it does if not for the fact that Steven Spielberg's direction serves as a smashingly accurate model of straightforward no-frills narrative expediency at its most deceptively basic and rattlingly effective: There isn't a single wasted moment, every frame counts, and the edge-of-your-seat suspense steadily escalates to a shockingly powerhouse white-knuckle zenith.

The Hitchhikers (1971; Dir. Ferd and Beverly Sebastian) - An enjoyably gory piece of '70s exploitation movie fluff centering on a six-woman outlaw gang who prey on luckless backwoods motorists. The gals are owned and trained by pleasantly mellow Manson-like societal drop-out Benson (shaggy hairball Norman

Klar), a charismatically anti-establishment type who wants to raise enough money to purchase a bus so he and his female family can go to California. Naive, pregnant teenage runaway Maggie (lovely, busty, lusty blonde fox Misty Rowe, who was a regular on *Hee Haw* and later played Marilyn Monroe in the awful biopic *Goodbye Norma Jean*) joins the fun-lovin', law-breakin' bunch and winds up fighting with possessive bitch Diana (statuesque brunette Linda Avery) over who's got exclusive dibs on Benson.

That's about it for the story, but freakily who really gives a flying rat's ass about some it-would-only-get-in-the-way plot? In its place there's sunny cinematography, lotsa roadside robberies, a generous sprinkling of gratuitous nudity (is there any other kind?), the inevitable skinny-dipping scene, sexy chicks in skimpy apparel (Rowe especially looks mighty enticing in a flimsy mini-dress), a pot party, some trashy melodramas (Maggie gets raped by a sleazeball jerk and has a miscarriage), catchy folk-country songs groovin' away on the soundtrack, a couple of catfights, charmingly dated hippie slang ("far out!"), a playful amoral tone, and absolutely no pretense to get in the way of the giddy dippiness. Brought to us by Ferd and Beverly Sebastian, the same husband and wife filmmaking team who gave us the Claudia Jennings classic *Gatorbar* and the car chase dilly *Flesh and the Firecat*.

## Macon County Line (1973)

Dir. Richard Compton

Two happy-go-lucky brothers (amazingly played by real-life siblings Alan and Jesse Vint) and a pretty female hitch-hiker (blonde curvy pic sprite Cheryl Waters) embark on a rowdy cross-country fun spree in the deep South in the '50s. Their fun comes to an abrupt halt when they run afoul of a repressively square good'ol boy sheriff (played by producer and co-screenwriter Max Baer, *Jethro* on *The Beverly Hillbillies*) who doesn't cotton to any smart-ass outsiders romping around his podunk burg. Things go from bad to worse when a pair of criminals murder the sheriff's wife and the sheriff erroneously assumes that the brothers and their ladyfriend are responsible.

Without a doubt one of the all-time great Southern-fried low-budget '70s drive-in classics, this darling is a personal favorite. Richard Compton directs with real energy and proficiency, skilfully handling the sudden shift from boisterous comedy to gut-tearing suspense. Daniel Laramore's handsome cinematography makes expert use of natural light, thereby giving this pic a plausibly rough and grainy unpolished look. The performances are all on-target, with '70s teen pop idol Leif Garrett as the sheriff's son, Doolie; Weaver as a dodder of cuss and especially Geoffrey Lewis as a cranky gas station proprietor. The grim, kick-you-in-the-stomach violent and disturbing surprise ending packs one hell of a savage wallop. The film's monumental box office success (it made a hefty \$35

million during its original theatrical run) beget a handful of "don't go down to Dixie" exploitation movie cash-in copies, a sub-genre unto itself which includes the lame'n'tame sequel *A Return to Macon County*, the bleak'n'brutal *Jackson County Jail*, the spirited *Moving Violation*, and the revolting secessionist *A Nightmare in Budham County*.

IN FILM "DURÒ" COME I SUI PERSONAGGI!



## Hitch-Hike (1976)

Italian; Dir. Pasquale Festa Campanile  
a.k.a. *Death Drive & Autostop Rosso Sangue*

David Hess, everyone's favorite live-wire purveyor of vile villainy, is in real sensational sickfuck form here. Hess plays Andy Conan, a bandit who thumps a ride from a mean, washed-up alcoholic reporter (*The Django* man himself, Franco Nero) and his much-abused wife (the lovely Corinne Clery of *The Story of O* infamy). Hess forces the squabbling, unhappy couple at gunpoint to drive him to Mexico. During the lengthy, intense, eventful pilgrimage, Hess makes Nero start writing a book about his foul illegal exploits (at one point Hess even rapes Clery in order to ensure that there's enough sex in the book to make it a hot, worthy read!). The quarreling throners each takes turns exposing the others' flaws and hypocrisies, thus paving the way for several interesting complications.

Combining the cross-country road movie with your basic psycho pic with genuinely unnerving results, *Hitch-Hike* takes the viewer on a wonderfully twisted ride. The three leads are terrific. Hess in particular excels as the awesomely ugly, nasty, and constantly giggling arro-

giant bastard gonzo killer. The film's only serious weakness is a lovey-dovey hippie sing-along folkie song which sporadically mewls away on the soundtrack and proves to be almost as disgusting as Heff's slimy character. That minor fault aside, *Hitch-Hike* rates highly as one wacky road movie thriller that's well worth picking up.

## Joyride to Nowhere (1977)

Dir. Mel Welles

The eminently huggable blonde doll Leslie Ackerman (the hick chick ingenue in *The Flirt* and *Madame X*) and equally cuddlesome brunette Sandy Serrano are Cindy and Leah, a pair of teenage runaways who turn all the guys' heads with effortless ease. Fed up with their grim dysfunctional families, Cindy and Leah hit the road in search of a better life. Trouble occurs when they encounter lecherous jerkweed mobster "Tank" McCall (Mel Welles, a regular in Roger Corman movies from the '50s and '60s). The girls make off with Tank's beloved Cadillac, not knowing there's a hot \$2 million stashed in the trunk. Tank's flunkies and the cops give chase.

Welles directs this delightfully irate '70s piffle with the same light, playful touch that made his sublimely silly *Lady Frankenstein* such a top-drawer trashy treat. A likeable inconsequential flick.

## High Rolling in a Hot Corvette (1977)

Australian; Dir. Igor Auzins  
a.k.a. *High Rolling*

Cocky, womanizing American bellboy Tex (packish, toupee-haired Joseph Bottoms) and his shy, Aussie pal Alby (strapping behemoth Grigor Taylor) are a couple of bored stiff carnival workers eager for some fun and excitement. So they quit the carnny life and go hitching across the countryside searching for thrills. The young guys get more than they bargained for when they meet aggressive homosexual drug dealer Arnold (bullyish, brutish John Clayton), beat him up, and steal his wad of cash and bitchin' souped-up Corvette.

Pretty soon Tex and Alby get into further trouble when they cruise the sunny beaches, pick up female thumber Lynn (the astonishingly cute Judy Davis in her film debut), swing with sexy night club singers Sugar and Spice (Sandra McGregor and Wendy Hughes), resort to robbery when their money runs out, and try to evade both the police and an understandably vengeful Arnold.

*High Rolling in a Hot Corvette* starts out shaggily, but thankfully gains snap and momentum as it plugs along. This perfectly mellow and enjoyable diversion features a catchy duco score by Sherbet, charming chemistry between the engagingly roguish Bottoms and the more subdued Taylor, a pleasantly trim 82 minute running time, and a rousing last-reel car chase.

## A Great Ride (1978)

Dir. Donald Hulette

This really offbeat and involving entry in the '70s cross-country road movie genre plays like a wiggy seriocomic cross between *Duel* and *Easy Rider*. Cocky motorcross champion Jim Dancer (Perry Lang) and his more mature bike-riding buddy Steve Mitchell (Michael Sullivan) decide to trek from Mexico to Canada via an unmarked off-road route. During their trek our two protagonists encounter a colorfully mixed bag of people including a perky middle-aged lady who wrecks cars for a living (and jumps in the sack with Mitchell!), a couple of sexy swingin' single chicks who make it with the guys in a lake, a friendly farmer, and a hotshot teenage aspiring motorcross rider who challenges Dancer to a race. This later episode ends in tragedy with the kid taking a fatal spill off his bike. So the kid's gang-he gun fanatic hard-ass dad (a frighteningly intense Michael MacRae) hunts Dancer and Mitchell down in his sinister souped-up truck, a real fearsome vehicle which comes complete with floodlights, an M-16 rifle, and a sophisticated state-of-the-art computer tracking device.

Alternating between thoughtful moments of introspection, tense cat-and-mouse chase action, and occasional diversions into either raucous comedy or steamy soft-core interludes, this quirky offering makes for an intriguing film. It's a real labor of low-budget love by Donald Hulette, who not only did the sinewy direction, but also co-produced the pic and supplied the hip bluesy rock score.

## Tourist Trap (1979)

Dir. David Schmoeller

One of the oddest, most eerie horror film doozies to come out of the '70s, *Tourist Trap* rates as a real weirdie – even by the loose, free-wheeling, convention-defying "anything goes" standards of the era.

Five teenagers driving through the barren California desert get hopelessly lost in the middle of nowhere and blow a tire. The stumble across "Slasen's Lost Oasis," a seedy, rundown roadside dive that's one part gas station, three parts crummy wax dummy museum, and all parts ratty and forbidding.

The joint's lonely, seemingly harmless owner (jubilantly overplayed by Chuck Connors), turns out to be a deranged psychic killer with telekinetic powers. Slasen brings his freaky assortment of uncomfortably human-like mannequins to life and picks off the kids one by one so he can add them to his ever-growing collection of victims.

Director David Schmoeller adeptly wrings every last ounce of tension he can squeeze from the pleasingly ambiguous and open-ended script he co-wrote with J. Larry Carroll. Hell, even a pre-Charlie's Angels Tanya Roberts handles herself well as a luckless lass who has a knife levitated into her head! Off-beat and unusual, *Tourist Trap* is well worth visiting.

## Road Games (1981)

Australian; Dir. Richard Franklin

While driving a load of freight across the godforsaken Australian outback, American truck driver Pat Quid (Stacy Keach) begins to suspect that a man in a van he keeps seeing might very well be the vicious psycho who's been murdering attractive lady hitch-hikers and leaving their chopped-up bodies on the side of the road. The only problem is that Quid can't convince anyone else. Pretty soon Quid's life is put in jeopardy. Early '80s horror queen Jamie Lee Curtis pops up as a bratty runaway rich heiress who's along for the ride.

Cunningly combining elements of *Duel*, vintage Alfred Hitchcock thrillers (chiefly *Rear Window*), '70s existential road movies, and '80s slasher fare, *Road Games* works like gangbusters. Richard Franklin (who next did the surprisingly acceptable *Psycho II*) directs with tremendous skill and assurance, while both Brian May's flavorful, harmonica-tinged score and Vincent Morton's exquisitely expansive cinematography are definitely up to par. Moreover, the dingy desert locations evoke a frighteningly palpable feeling of all-encompassing dread and vulnerability, and the final confrontation between Quid and the killer in a cramped back alley delivers one hell of a potent gut punch. An eerie, understated, and overall quite intelligent stand-out scary sleeper.

## Mutant (1983)

Dir. John "Bud" Cardos  
a.k.a. *Night Shadows & Toxic Waste*

If anyone out there ever wondered what an atmosphere-emphasizing, modestly produced, capably acted cross between *Macon County Line* and *Night of the Living Dead* would be like, this surprisingly sound lethal toxic mutants running mindlessly amuck downhome horror feature will answer all your questions quite nicely.

All the staple Southern-fried drive-in movie ingredients are present and accounted for: Two clean-cut young Northerners are treated with utmost inhospitality by the local yokels of a tiny armpit stick hamlet that they're just innocently passing through on a cross-country drive. Some nefarious cost-cutting company dumps illegal radioactive gunk in the forest which causes a few townies to transform into blue-faced zombies with rapidly diminishing blood who kill hapless uncontaminated folks for their precious body fluids. And a skeptical recovering alcoholic sheriff (Bea Hopkins in her amateurish redneck lawman role) refuses to believe in any of it until it's too late.

Yeah, nothing about this particular flick manages to be really surprising or original as far as the story is concerned. However, sometimes the story alone doesn't make a film good; the performances and execution matter a lot, too. Luckily, said execution, specifically Al Adamson's protégé John "Bud" Cardos' competent direction



and B-pic composer Richard (Plutose, *From Beyond*) Band's eerie score runs on all cylinders with bang-up effectiveness.

### Cross Country (1983)

Canadian, Dir: Paul Lynch

Uptight Philadelphia advertising executive Evan (Richard Beymer) immediately skips town in his Mercedes following the murder of a high-class call girl. Prior to embarking on a cross-country road trip to California, Evan picks up neurotic prostitute Lois (Nina Axelrod, a flash-in-the-paa early '80s scream queen who eventually quit acting to become a casting director) and her equally high-strung, ex-con musician boyfriend John (Brent Carver). The dangerously unstable wacko twosome proceed to greatly exacerbate the severity of Evan's already dire predicament. Meanwhile, ramrod homicide detective and would-be blackmailer Ed Roersch (Michael Ironside) gives dogged chase.

This is a shamefully neglected and undervalued spot-on spine-chilling powerhouse.

### Horror House on Highway Five (1985)

Dir: Richard Casey

What an unbearably dumb and downright fuckin' dreary piece of hideously malodorous celluloid shit!

A crazed, bloodthirsty mo-kill and terrorize several luckless individuals around the titular area. The freaky threesome are actually a nice, happy dysfunctional family: a crackpot dad who likes to do the murderous deed while wearing a rubber Nixon mask, a bumbling imbecile son, and another idiot male offspring – this one with live maggots residing in his cranium (!).

A clumsily sincere attempt at a perversely humorous, darkly tongue-in-cheek backroads psycho pic parody, *Horror House on Highway Five*'s extremely forced, grinding-its-wheels-in-the-mud execution completely ruins its chances at being an effective send-up. If it had been done with more polish and vigor, this wash-out could have made for an amusing fright film black comedy, but since it's bland and slapdash it instead qualifies as a very middling and forgettable cinematic dead end.

### The Hitcher (1986)

Dir: Robert Harmon

Sweet, wet-behind-the-ears naif Jim Halsey (C. Thomas Howell) is driving a friend's car from Chicago to San Diego by traveling across the dusty, desolate Texas backroads. Halsey makes the grave mistake of giving a ride to mysterious hitch-hiker John Ryder (Rutger Hauer, who's never been more serenely chilling than he is here), a serial killer whose attempt at adding Halsey to his ever-growing number of victims gets foiled when Halsey forcefully ejects him from his speeding car.

But Ryder hasn't finished with the hapless lad. Pretty soon, poor Jim has been incriminated in a series of gruesome murders that were committed by Ryder, who obviously wants the boy to overcome his wimpiness and work up the necessary guts to, for reasons which are hinted at, but never completely explained (subconscious guilt? Sothing repressed homosexual lust? A desire to call it quits and have someone else assume the role you played in life? The possibilities are endless...), take him out. Naturally, the cops are useless and token nice gal waitress Jennifer Jason Leigh tries to help out, only to meet a particularly nasty end.

Director Robert Harmon milks the harsh, upsetting implications of Eric Red's stylized open-ended and allegorical script for all they're worth, creating a potently tense, brooding, oddy surreal nightmarish atmosphere that's both engrossingly twisted and deliciously oblique. I saw this on-the-road chiller diller in the theater when it was initially released and vividly recall the audience breaking out in loud applause when Halsey blows away Ryder with a shotgun at the pic's climax. Red went on to write the similarly superior vampire road movie knock-out *Near Dark*.

### Blood Salvage (1988)

Dir: Tucker Johnson

A cheerfully (and uprootingly) gruesome Southern-fried hillbilly gore opus about the demented backwoods Pruitt clan who take advantage of hapless passersby when their automobiles break down, turning the motorists into involuntary donors for their human body-organ spare-parts ring.

Well directed by Tucker Johnson (who also co-wrote the wully wigged-out script), with first-rate make-up fx by Tony Gauthier and Bill "Splat" Johnson. There's also a quick cameo by professional boxer Evander Holyfield as – what else? – a boxer. And there's a hilarious ending credits gospel theme song that's sung horrendously off-key by Pa Pruitt and his boys ("Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?"). This inspired off-litter cross between *Convict* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* sizes up as a rural splatter shocker.

### Curse It: The Bite (1988)

Italian-Japanese, Dir: Federico Prosperi  
a.k.a. *The Bite*

A sterling example of how a threadbare and unpromising premise can be made genuinely creepy and effective thanks to a proficient execution. Granted, the story ain't much: Young fellow Clark (J. Eddie Peck) and his sweet girlfriend Lisa (late '80s scream queen cutie Jill Schoelen of *The Stepfather* fame) are driving their jeep across the parched, dismal Arizona desert. The pair take an ill-advised detour off the main road and discover an old abandoned nuclear test sight. Things turn sour when one of the jeep tires goes flat. Things get worse when Clark gets bitten by a radioactive snake. And, naturally, things become all the more hairy and freaky when Clark's

bitten arm begins to mutate into a foul, icky, highly deadly and disgusting serpentine monster!

As I said before, the plot leaves plenty to be desired. However, with this supremely yucky gagfest it's not the story that counts; it's *Screaming Mad George's* vile make-up fx. Among the pic's sickening splatter highlights are a woman's *penis* being torn off, a man's heart being yanked out of his throat, and Clark vomiting forth dozens of steaming slobbery snakes.

## Cohen and Tate (1988)

Dir. Eric Red

The old, wise veteran Cohen (Roy Scheider) and his much younger, hot-tempered partner Tate (Adam Baldwin) are a couple of radically contrasting contract killers who abduct Travis Knight (Harley Cross), a nine-year-old tyke who witnessed a mob hit. They make a desperate 24-hour cross-country drive to Houston. When they reach their destination the boy will be killed. The smart, perceptive and resourceful Travis quickly realizes that the only possible way he might survive this ordeal is by curiously setting both assassins against each other.

*The Hitcher* screenwriter Eric Red made his impressive directorial debut with this resolutely grim, gritty, and gripping road movie thriller variant on O. Henry's classic short story "The Ransom of Red Chief." Undeservedly vilified by critics during its short-lived theatrical release, this brutally effective and absorbing overlooked little hit is worthy of rediscovery.

## Hitcher in the Dark (1989)

Italian; Dir. Umberto Lenzi  
a.k.a. *Hitcher 2, Fear in the Dark & Camper*

Misogynistic psycho wackjob Mark (Joe Balogh) wears mirror shades, suffers from a severe mommy complex, drives a fancy Winnebago, and has a nasty penchant for picking up stay young foxy female hitch-hikers whom he likes to rape, debase, and brutally murder.

Mark chooses frisky Daniela (blonde hottie Josie Bissett, who went on to slightly more respectable work as a regular on the nighttime soap *Melrose Place*) as his next victim and abducts her. Daniela's obsessive boyfriend Kevin (Jason Sauer) gives chase.

Limply directed by spaghetti splatter movie specialist Umberto Lenzi (Nightmare City) Lenz (who also wrote the flat, talky cookie-cutter script), with sluggish pacing, nil suspense, mostly mild and goreless violence, atrocious acting, and a bland plot which offers no fresh twists or novel surprises, this strictly from-hunger Eurodreck rip-off of *The Hitcher* qualifies as a real four-star stinker.

However, both Jerry Phillips' slick cinematography and Pierre Morel's throb'in' rock score are up to par, while the copious gratuitous nudity rates as the single most watchable and enjoyable thing in this whole god forsaken turkey (sad T & A includes several scenes of Bissett in the buff and an especially tasty wet t-shirt contest).

And hardcore Bissett haters such as yours truly should get a kick out of the extensive degradation Josie suffers throughout the flick: she's drugged, gagged, and handcuffed by our star loony, has her hair cut short and dyed black, gets photographed by nutso while nude and unconscious, and is even forced to watch the freak carve the word "pig" in Kevin's chest with a switchblade. Taking that last snippet into greater consideration, I guess this pic ain't so bad after all.

## Midnight Ride (1990)

Italian; Dir. Robert Balver

This delightfully drecky direct-to-video piñata rates a close second behind *Hitch-Hike to Hell* as far as upbraidingly over-the-top psycho potboilers are concerned. A hilariously miscast Mark "Luke Skywalker" Hamill eschews the force in favor of chortling, hammy subtlety-be-damned psychosis as murderous, fresh-out-of-the-booty-hatch patient Justin McCay, who stalks and terrorizes sweet Lora Markman (Savina Gersak) across lonesome California backroads en route to returning to the laughter factory so he can reunite himself with well-meaning, but ineffectual shrink Dr. Hardy (a haggard Robert Mitchum shuffling his way to an easy paycheck). Lora's rugged, ass-stompin' policeman Hubby Mark (Michael Dudikoff giving one of his better performances) comes to the rescue.

This choice chunk of Italian horror trash makes for a savory schlockoid slice of "danger on the road" mayhem. Of course, it's Hamill's zealous, maniacal histrionics which gives this homicidal hitch-hiker opus its extra special sleazy kick: Mark rants and laughs hysterically, bites his fingernails, snaps photos of his victim with an instantan camera, ties Dudikoff to the hood of a speeding cab car, steals a bus, sniffs a few cops at a gas station, sticks on an ugly, unfriendly fat lady's glass eye (!), and generally behaves in a manner most unbecoming of a former Jedi Knight. Watching Hamill let it all hang out somethin' freaky consolidates this pup's status as a topflight cinecheese hoot and a half.

## Highway to Hell (1991)

Dir. Ate De Jong

Charlie (Chad Lowe, Rob Lowe's boynish younger brother) and Rachel (Kristy Swanson, who originated the part of everyone's favorite bloodsucker-stomping cheerleader in the movie flop *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) are a sweetly pure and innocent young couple who make the usual mistake of driving down a remote desert dirt road. When Rachel gets abducted by the superhuman fiend Hellcop (hulking C.J. Graham; Jason in *Friday the 13th Part VI*), Charlie has to literally go to hell to rescue Rachel within twenty-four hours or otherwise the Devil will have her soul for all eternity.

Director Ate De Jong, working from Brian Helgeland's quirky creative script, presents a gloriously off-beat vision of Hades in this wildly

eccentric and imaginative horror-comedy-drama-action-adventure handy dandy multi-genre combo oddity.

Among the arrestingly off-kilter sights to be seen in this wacked-out beast are a diner with a short order cook (a pre-stardom Ben Stiller) who fries eggs on the sidewalk, a psycho ice cream man, road workers who all look like Andy Warhol, a butt-ugly horny lady demon, a three-headed mutant dog, and a highway with nothing but speeding Volkswagens rippin' down the road.

Love makes for a refreshingly winsy and refractile hero, while Swanson registers strongly as an appealing maiden in distress. Popping up in snazzy bits are the ever-amiable Richard Farnsworth as a folksy gas station proprietor, Pamela Gidley as a helpful motorcycle mama, '80s hard rocker Lisa Ford as a crazed hitch-hiker, and stand-up comic Gilbert Gottfried as a neurotic Hitler.

## Dust Devil (1992)

British; Dir. Richard Stanley

Fed-up with her unhappy marriage, a disaffected young woman (Chelsea Field) leaves her dull husband and goes driving off into the desolate South African desert. Field encounters a mysterious hitch-hiker (Robert John Burke) who turns out to be an ancient evil spirit of longstanding local mythology who only preys on people who've given up on life. If Field doesn't regain her will to live right away she'll become the latest of Burke's many victims. Meanwhile, obsessive cop Zakes Mokae gives dogged pursuit.

Wimpy director Richard Stanley adroitly tells the quirky and macabre story of a gradual pace, creating and sustaining a grimly serious spooked-out otherworldly atmosphere which becomes more exceedingly nightmarish and surrealistic as the film progresses towards its unnerving anything-can-happen conventional reality-be-damned conclusion. Add jolting outbursts of unflinchingly harsh and brutal violence, across-the-board top-rate acting, sumptuous sweeping shots of the arid, dirt-caked desert wasteland, and an engrossingly fresh and thorough exploration of South African demonology. The net result is one of the finest, most boldly different and creative unsung horror humdingers of the early '90s.

## Kalifornia (1993)

Dir. Dominique Sena

Without a doubt the worst, most annoyingly pretentious and superficial "danger on the road" thriller to ever disgrace celluloid.

Irksome yuppie couple Michelle Forbes and David Duchovny decide to drive from Pittsburgh to California via the desert route. During this journey they make the grave mistake of picking up scraggly dirtbag psychopath Brad Pitt and his dumbbitch wife Juliette Lewis. You can fill in the blanks about what happens next.

While the central premise has potential, it's

named by thuddingly obvious observations, a plodding pace, heavy-handed irony, and hideously unsympathetic characters (Forbes and Duchovny are especially irritating and unlikeable, despite the fact that they're supposed to be the hero and heroine of this pic!).

And then there's the most horrible offense of all: director Dominic Sena shooting the whole thing in an appallingly overproduced flashy'n'plushy nuzzle-dazzle slicker-than-shit pop promo style that's more appropriate for an MTV video than a feature length movie.

Lewis tackled a similar wacko drifter biter half role in Oliver Stone's just as unwatchably overblown *Natural Born Killers*.

## The Nature of the Beast (1994)

Dir. Victor Salva

Antsy, high-strung traveling salesman Jack crosses paths with mean ex-con junkie drifter Adrian while trekking across the dusty, remote California desert. Meanwhile, a savage serial killer called "the Hatchet Man" commits gruesome dismemberment murders, and a million dollars has recently been stolen from a Las Vegas casino. Is it Jack or Adrian who's behind one or both of these crimes?

Writer/director Victor Salva sells the eerily spellbinding narrative at a leisurely pace, wisely allowing the precisely etched characters and spooky, discomfiting atmosphere to carry the day with casual, effortless assurance. Lance Henriksen portrays Jack with his customary top-drawer sense, tightly-coiled-spring intensity. Eric Roberts lands himself a jucy part as Adrian and sinks his teeth into it with lip-licking glee. Late, great villainous character thesp Benon James has a welcome change-of-pace good guy role as a dangerous sheriff.

Grim, despoiling, and uncompromisingly upsetting, *The Nature of the Beast* overall rates as one of the true undeservedly neglected skunk-crawling sleepers from the '90s. Salva went on to make the socks socks breakfast *Jeepers Creepers*, which actually pays due homage to *Duel*.

## Freeway (1996)

Dir. Matthew Bacht

A nasty and subversive contemporary road movie thriller spin on *Little Red Riding Hood*, with a brassy'n'assy performance by Reese Witherspoon as a scrappy California teenage runaway who runs afoul of a pimicious roadside serial killer (Keifer Sutherland) who's on a self-appointed mission to rid the world of "garbage people." Witherspoon narrowly avoids getting killed by Sutherland, seriously hurting Sutherland and winding up in jail on a trumped-up assault charge. However, Witherspoon manages to escape so she and Sutherland can have a ferocious climactic showdown at grandmother's house, which in this pic turns out to be a grimy mobile home located in a seedy whitetrash trailerpark.



Popping up in super supporting parts are Brooke Shields as Sutherland's snobby, unsympathetic wife, Amanda Plummer as Witherspoon's pathetic junkie hooker mother, Michael T. Weiss as Witherspoon's skeevy abusive stepdad, Brittany Murphy as a cheery lesbian, and Sydney Lassick as the jolly trailerpark manager. Great barn-stomping opening credits theme by Danny Elfman, too.

Director Bacht followed this honey with the even more berserk and hysterically tasteless sequel *Freeway II: Confessions of a Trick Baby*, which gives the deviant modern-day workover treatment to *Hansel and Gretel* with stupendously scuzzoid results.

## Retroactive (1997)

Dir. Louis Momeau

In the wake of an unfortunate incident which led to six folks losing their lives, hostage negotiator Karen Warren (Kylie Travis) quits her job and goes driving cross country to get her head together. Problems arise when Karen wrecks her car in the middle of an empty stretch of barren Texas backroads. Karen's given a lift by foul, hot-tempered redneck psycho criminal Frank Lloyd (James Belushi) and his torpid, browbeaten wife Rayanne (direct-to-video erotic thriller starlet Shannon Whirry). Frank kills Rayanne in a fit of rage when he finds out she's cheating on him. Karen narrowly avoids being bagged by Frank, seeking shelter in a secret government compound where token nerd scientist Brian (a charmingly boyish Frank Whaley) is experimenting with time travel. Karen goes back twenty minutes in time and attempts to stop Frank from killing Rayanne with even more disastrous results. Bound and determined to get things right, Karen goes back in time again. And then again when things go even more awry.

Director Louis Momeau, working from a sharp-witted and imaginative script, ingeniously blends elements of a grungy road movie with a nifty central sci-fi premise into an excitingly dynamic, absorbing, and oftentimes literally explosive handily dandy multi-genre combo synthesis.

Mark Hamill is murderous, fresh-out-of-the-booby-hatch patient Justin McCay, who stalks and temorizes sweet Lara Markman (Savina Gensak) across lonesome California backroads in 1990's *Midnight Ride*.

The extremely exhilarating action sequences are staged with heart-stopping brio and ability, the suspense is dexterously stoked to the nerve-frying ninth degree, the admittedly funky special effects are used with laudable judiciousness, and the furiously forward-ho headlong pace never once flags or falters during the film's fiercely zesty 91-min running time. The always welcome and invigorating M. Emmet Walsh contributes a cogent cameo as a weaselly gas station proprietor. Belushi's rip-roaring hog-wild histrionics as the volatile Frank are a riot to watch, injecting a sense of pitch-black humor to the generally serious proceedings. Most impressive of all is Kyle Travis' fiery performance as Karen, whose deep-seated need for redemption and exceptional bravery make her a very moving tragic heroine.

An award-winning feature at numerous foreign fantasy film festivals, this bug-up indie sleeper deserves all the acclaim and accolades it has garnered abroad.

## Breakdown (1997)

Dir. Jonathan Mostow

Successful businessman Jeff Taylor (the always dependable Kurt Russell) and his wife Amy (Kathleen Quinlan) are driving from Massachusetts to California in their expensive new car via the desert backroads route. The car breaks down. Amy hitches a ride with a friendly tracker (J.T. Walsh, who's magnificent as usual). When Jeff later tries to find Amy, he realizes that she's been abducted and he'll have to do whatever it takes to get her back alive and in one piece.

There are no dreary, dragged-out expository lulls to be found. The zippy pacing and grimy tension are keenly honed to sharp, stinging points, thereby resulting in a neatly bracing and suspenseful medium-budget thriller which became a surprise sleeper hit.

This is the kind of movie they regrettably just don't make too much anymore: a tightly plotted, slickly mounted B-pic from a major studio with no unnecessary flashy trimmings or fancy-frimancy highbrow messages that's actually pretty goddamn good.

## Perdita Durango (1997)

Spanish-Mexican; Dir. Alex de la Iglesia

A touchingly subdued Rosie Perez stars in this excessive and over-the-top tasteless el schlock marvel as the titular femme fatale, a blithely amoral Tex-Mex criminal sociopath who finds her ideal male counterpart in the form of one Romeo Dolorosa (Javier Bardem), a bank robber who practices Santeria, a deadly dark religion which involves blood drinking and corpse mutilation.

The gleefully depraved/n'demanged duo decide to drive a truck full of human fetuses to Las Vegas for a notoriously mad mobster (Don Stroud). During their cross-country crime spree the pernicious pair pick up innocent teen travelers Harley Cross (the little boy in *Cohen and Tate*) and Amie Graham (the lookalike blonde babe sister of Heather Graham), whom Romeo and Perdita plan to ritually sacrifice after they're through raping and debasing them first. Meanwhile, an irate and obsessive DEA agent (James Gandolfini) gives hot pursuit.

Director/co-screenwriter Alex de la Iglesia, fresh off the cult success of his end-of-the-world pig *The Day of the Beast*, crams this supremely slimy/sordid south-of-the-border road thriller exploitation slasherflick with more than enough gratuitous nudity, sexual deviance, religious hubub, harsh violence, and all-out no-holds-barred degeneracy to make this warped wonder one helluva lot of dredged-up-all-hot-and-nasty-fetish-the-cinematic-trashbucket farr. The film even goes as far as to toss in legendary shock rocker Screamin' Jay Hawkins in a juivey supporting role as Romeo's Santeria assistant.

At a bloated 124 minutes this overstays its welcome, but would still make a killer double bill with the similarly subversive *Frenzy*.

## Road Rage (2000)

Dir. Sidney J. Furie

After they accidentally cut off an ominous giant black pick-up truck on the highway, both dashing limousine driver Jim Travis (Casper Van Dien) and his fetching passenger Sonia Walker (Danielle Brett) end up being relentlessly terrorized on an isolated patch of sticksville backroads by the pick-up's dangerously unbalanced and irritable owner.

Veteran director Sidney J. Furie tackles the admittedly trite material with commendable flair and aplomb, keeping the pace sprightly and unflagging throughout, creating a goodly amount of tension, and staging several truly spectacular bash 'em, crash 'em, and smash 'em car chases. Moreover, both leads turn in personable performances, the dialogue possesses real snap and wit, there's a few genuinely startling plot twists, the blaring rock score totally smokes, and, most important of all, once again we've got no pretense whatsoever to be found in a single fleet frame of this galvanizing little beast.

## Short Cut Road (2000)

Dir. Marc Selz

Six college kids driving back from a rock festival run foul of a couple of psycho hillbilly brothers when their van breaks down on a remote rural road. You can basically fill in the blanks as to what happens next, so it's a real testament to writer/director/producer/cinematographer/co-editor Mark Selz's skill and talent that this solid little low-budget indie horror shocker packs such an unexpectedly strong knock-the-wind-out-of-your-lungs punch.

This up-to-snuff number hits all the necessary slice-of-life body count slasher bases to pass muster as a definite winner. Overall, there's enough cinematic strengths present and accounted for to make up for hit-or-miss acting and extremely variable sound quality.

## The Forsaken (2001)

Dir. J. S. Cardone

While driving a delivery car across deserted badlands backroads, self-absorbed twenty-something slacker Sean (Kerr Smith) winds up running into both a scruffy vampire-hunter hitch-hiker (Brendan Fehr) and a deadly band of age-old itinerant bloodsuckers led by the smoothly malevolent Jonathan Schaech.

Opening with the arresting image of beautiful blonde babe Isabella Miles washing blood off her bare breasts, culminating with an exciting explosive climax, with a handy helping of graphic gore and rousing vehicular action sandwiched in between, this down 'n'dirty exploitation horror flick sizes up as a tasty trashbag terror treat. Writer/director J. S. Cardone elicits sound performances from the cast (Carrie Snodgress contributes a lively last-reel cameo as a feisty old battle-axe), keeps the pace fast'n'furious, and delivers the unapologetically junky goods with a wonderful dearth of pretense.

## Joyride (2001)

Dir. John Dahl

During a lengthy cross-country trek from Boulder to Princeton, chronic fuck-up Fuller (Steve Zahn) and his more sensible, but gullible do-eighth brother Lewis (Paul Walker of *The Fast and the Furious*) decide to pull what they think is essentially a harmless prank on a colorfully lascivious trucker who goes under the faintly sinister handle of Rusty Nail. Alas, the actually quite-cruel prank the boys play on the unsuspecting Rusty turns out to have far greater and more severe repercussions than they expected. Pretty soon the vengeful, and dangerously crafty Rusty is subjecting the hapless siblings to an extremely harrowing campaign of terror, teaching the irresponsible slacker duo a long, painful, and often quite brutal lesson that all actions, even allegedly silly and facetious ones, do indeed beget serious consequences for everyone involved.

Sure, the central premise – highly reminiscent

of *Breakdown* and *Duel* – seems hackneyed and sounds unpromising, but fortunately what we get here is one of those wondrous examples of how a pretty shoddy "danger on the road" thriller story can be substantially redeemed and made bracingly effective thanks to a brisk, efficient execution. Truly woudt B-pie noir specialist John (*The Last Seduction*, *Rounders*) Dahl's hang-up proficient direction deserves a lion's share of the credit. The smart script by Clay Tarver and J. J. Adams offers – amidst all the frights and scares – a thoughtful critique of reprehensibly immature and irresponsible Gen Xers whose flagrant disregard for other people's feelings is a fertile breeding ground for all kinds of grievous trouble. Better yet, Rusty Nail isn't some one-dimensional brutish creep, instead he's the sole guy in an increasingly callous and inconsiderate society who still has a conscience and as a result this makes him nutty, touchy, and not to be trifled with.

As *Lewis'* sweetly endearing college girlfriend, the attractive Leelee Sobieski makes for a winsomely feisty damsel in distress. And special kudos are in order for psycho thesp supreme Ted Levine (Buffalo Bill in *The Silence of the Lambs*), whose vocal-only turn as Rusty Nail is nothing short of extraordinary; Levine's deep, phlegmy, gravelly croak forcefully projects a genuine sense of seething menace.

## Route 666 (2001)

Dir. William Wesley

In 1988 former cameraman, theater director and Army documentary William Wesley made the living-dead horror variant *Scarecrows*. Thirteen years later Wesley finally resurfaced with this snazzy direct-to-video terror shocker which centers on a dry, uninviting patch of remote desert backroad haunted by the unrefined, eyeless spirits of four extremely vicious and dangerous changing convicts who were killed in a brutal roadside massacre back in '67. Rugged Federal marshal Lou Diamond Phillips, feisty lady cop Lori Petty, antsy mob informant Steven Williams, and several expendable fuzz encounter the fiendish undead felons when they make the unsound decision to use the titular condemned, closed-off highway as a shortcut. Meanwhile, a mob assassin pursues our beleaguered bickering bunch.

Ingenuously blending a fright-film premise with elements lifted from your basic road movie chase yarn and noir-leaning crime thrillers, *Route 666* provides loads of grue-slingin' creeped-out monsterflick fun. Wesley directs in the same "nothin' fancy" manner which distinguished *Scarecrows*.

Better still, we've got nice cameos by venerable elderly character actors L.Q. Jones as a folksy sheriff and Dick Miller as a gruff, gravel-voiced dater countermate.

In short, *Route 666* is just the place to visit for plenty of good, gory, neatly streamlined and to-the-point horror pic kicks.

## The Hitcher II: I've Been Waiting (2002)

Dir. Louis Mornéau

Still severely traumatized by his near-fatal run-in with deranged killer Ranger Hauser in the first *Hitcher*, Jim Halesy (ably reprised by C. Thomas Howell) decides to surmount his demons by returning back to the lonely stretch of West Texas backroads where the initial agonizing ordeal occurred. Jim's loving girlfriend Maggie (Kari Wahlgren) tags along for moral support. The pair encounter another shrewd psychotic hitchhiker named Jack (Jake Busey, who proves that he can play goggle-eyed psycho lunatics just as well as his dead old dad, Gary), who naturally proceeds to put Jim and Maggie through absolute nerve-shredding bloody hell.

This belated straight-to-video follow-up turns out to be a surprisingly solid, suspenseful, and satisfying sequel; it's directed with style and gusto to burn by Louis Mornéau (who previously scored with the superlative *Retrospective*). A surefire winner that almost matches the sterling quality of the simply astonishing original, this honkey's a whole lot better than you'd expect and definitely worth checking out.

## Pressure Point (2000)

Canadian; Dir. Eric Weston

Take-no-shit, two-fisted father Jed Griffin (Michael Madsen) and his family are driving cross country in a '79 Coachman motor home to a Vermont ski resort. Vicious psycho scumbeak bank robber Rudy Wicker (Jeff Wincott) commandeers the camper at gunpoint, shoots Jed, and leaves Jed on the side of the road. Wounded, but not down for the count, Jed has to save his wife and kids before Rudy wastes them. Complicating matters further is the fact that the police, led by sensible lady officer Dana Flower (Michelle Scarbelli), have mistaken Jed for Rudy.

Eric (Evilspine) Weston's sinewy direction ensures that this tense, hoppin', mean/lean direct-to-video B-action chase road thriller ass-kicker snaps, crackles, and pops like a wildly hyperactive bowl of Rice Krispies.

## Detour (2002)

Dir. S. Lee Taylor  
a.k.a. *Hell's Highway*

Not to be confused with the '45 film noir nugget. A bunch of obnoxious asshole kids in an RV attend a rave besh held deep in the desert. After the rave ends the kids decide to venture off the main highway onto an uncharted road in order to score some prime peyote. Instead the dumb-ass kids run smack dab into a bunch of ferocious hillbilly cannibal lunatics with a serious case of the uglies and a jarringly lack of civility. Naturally, the kids have to get in touch with their savage killer animal side pronto or otherwise they're all going to buy it.

This indie horror item has a lot going for it: S. Lee Taylor's direction is crisp and muscular, the central premise has pleasing echoes of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and especially *The Hills Have Eyes* (by the way, both those vintage '70s horror landmarks have a definite "danger on the road" bent to them), the violence is every bit as gory, brutal, and copious as it ought to be, the attractive cast of youthful unknowns give acceptable performances, the ample shocks are appropriately grisly, sudden and visceral, the production values are slick and accomplished, and the thrashy garage rock ending credits theme song is really bitchin'.

The only drawbacks are the rather pokey opening act and the fact that the teens are insufferably idiotic and unappealing to the

point where you don't care whether they live or die.

The unjustly maligned *Wrong Turn* tells a similar story in which the lascivious Eliuzi Dushku and friends encounter mutant redneck fiends when their car gets a flat tire on an isolated dirt road deep in the West Virginia wilderness. Rob Zombie's equally awesome *House of 1,000 Corpses* likewise relates almost the same exact plot with a group of young adults embarking on a cross-country trip who run into yet another crazed clan of deadly hick degenerates. And then there's the remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which I personally refuse to watch on the grounds that there's no way in hell one can feasibly improve on the outstanding original. Anyone starting to notice a trend here?



Whew, that was one incredibly scary, intense, perilous, and often-times downright harrowing cinematic road trip. I would like to end this article by giving you readers a few pieces of sound advice.

First, if during your travels you encounter a hitch-hiker who bears a passing resemblance to David Hess, Rutger Hauer, Mark Hamill, or Lawrence Tierney, don't even think of picking the guy up.

Second, do your best to be a polite and considerate motorist; don't go cutting off any vans or trucks just because they're going a few miles slower than the designated speed limit.

Last and most importantly, never, ever under any conditions stray from the main road. Steer clear of unmarked-on-the-map desert and backwoods alternative routes. Stick to the major highways at all times.

Or here's an ideal plan that should keep you out of danger altogether: The next time you decide to travel cross country don't do it by driving in a rental car; take a bus, plane or train instead. The life you save could very well be your own. ■

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CULT MOVIES

# WHAT'S BEHIND A

# CRIMSON CAPE?

by Jan Alan Henderson

**I**t's hard to believe that a decade has passed since the *Cult Movies* edition of *Spending Bullet: The George Reeves Story* was released. In that decade, our world has changed so much that some aspects of our lives are unrecognizable, yet some remain the same.

We now live with the constant threat of attacks from terrorists (both foreign and domestic) in our country and abroad.

The landscape of television now comprises reality shows, sitcoms about nothing, and up-to-the-minute news, paranoiac, and most importantly, sports. Cable Access shows allow all who have a spare hundred bucks to reach for their 15 minutes of fame.

Fifties television shows are now labeled Classic TV, and new ones released on an almost daily basis on DVD.

Articles and books, as well as movies have all been bandied about with regard to George Reeves. Some are better than others. Many are off-kilter, and most are more concerned with the night George died than any of the other days of his life. A good many of these projects have been viewed as offensive by George fans. Some have come to fruition, but many have not.

The point being that George Reeves was of his time. *The Adventures of Superman* was of its time. There will never be another Humphrey Bogart. Has there been another team of comics like the Three Stooges? Is there a crooner out there who will take the place in the collective hearts as Francis Albert Sinatra did? Babe Ruth's home run record may be broken, but his impact won't diminish. Babe, Bogey, the Stooges, and Frank are what legends are made of. So was George.

In the 1954 episode "The Unlucky Number," George states that "No one can do the things Superman does." Well, no one can do the things George Reeves did! No one can live in another's time fully. No one can live in another's mind! With all the ink used to chronicle George's mysterious death, his life and craft have all but been ignored. There seemed to be little left to write about on the subject. The question one has to ask oneself is how does one relate the events of one generation to another? With great difficulty!

In 2000, Steve Randisi suggested that he and I write a book about George Reeves; to which I replied, "What is there to do after *Spending Bullet?*" "The films of George Reeves," Steve rebutted. So we began a dialogue which lasted several days on how to do it, and why to do it.

Included in this dialogue was the author-publisher of *Superman on Television, Spaceman Lost, Heroes and Villains*, Mike Bifulco. The three of us mulled this around for many months. Steve and I were in constant contact, and soon chapters began to materialize. After five years of this process, we are now proud to announce the publication of *Behind the Crimson Cape - The Cinema of George Reeves*, a book that was truly five years in the making.

A monumental problem we faced was illustrating this book. After hours and hours that dissolved into years, by meticulously picking at the collectible market we came up with what we consider the best possible graphic representation available to us of George Reeves' life in Hollywood in front of the cameras. Some things came to us on loan, and others were culled from collectors (eBay), bookstores, and paper shows. We have tried to illustrate each and every chapter

with a photo of George from the said film. But sometimes George only briefly appeared in the film, ended up on the cutting room floor, or we could find nothing of representation of his contribution to these productions. In these cases we have substituted illustrations from the film, but without George Reeves. In some cases we have used newspaper and press book advertising materials. We hope with you, the reader's, indulgence you can fill in our blanks as you peruse this tome.

This book contains well over 300 illustrations and a critical analysis and synopsis of each of George's sixty-plus films. It is handsack with a dust jacket, and suitable for every George fan's growing library. Also included is a selection of photographs from various phases of George's career. Some are culled from the ill-fated Fair Tour of the summer of 1957. Many of these stills have never been published, most notably a sequence of photographs of actor/stuntman/author and friend of George, Gene LatBell as Mr. Kryptonite wrestling George as the Man of Steel. These photographs have not been seen in 48 years.

I would like to take this opportunity to apologize for us being eight months off our original release date, but we all know as John Lennon said, "Life is truly what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." And with pesky computer problems, each partner with other jobs, and not enough time in the day, time got away from us. For this we are sorry, and hope that *Behind the Crimson Cape - The Cinema of George Reeves* will more than make up for the time you have had to wait. ■

For ordering info, contact Michael Bifulco at [mbjbooks5@comcast.net](mailto:mbjbooks5@comcast.net)





# FINAL THOUGHTS:

Godzilla authority Guy Tucker reviews *Godzilla: Final Wars*



Almost certainly the most divisive movie of its series yet made, *Godzilla: Final Wars* opens with a credit dedicating the film, to three of the gentlemen who made the original 50 years back: producer Tomoyuki Tanaka, director Ishiro Honda and special effects master Eiji Tsuburaya. It then goes on to produce a spectacle that not one of them could even vaguely have conceived of and very possibly would have hated.

It's difficult to know what to say about *Final Wars* except that at the very least, it's ingeniously executed; reportedly the largest budget ever assigned to a Godzilla movie was granted to this one (although I'm not so sure that, if one adjusted for inflation, that *Godzilla 1984*, the 30th anniversary movie, still wasn't more invisibly appointed). *Final Wars* is a great deal less traditional than the 1984 movie was, at least superficially; both pictures are balls-to-the-wall, spare-no-expense extravaganzas, but also each are made by filmmakers with tremendously different instincts, and utterly different agendas.

*Final Wars* director Ryûhei Kitamura is perhaps the most singular, paradoxical stylist ever to work on a Godzilla film; all those who went before him either originated the tradition of how Japanese monster movies were made, or were just copying it. (Okay, there's one exception, the brilliant Shusuke Kaneko, whose 2001 movie *GMK* is the best Godzilla movie Ishirô Honda never made. Or if not that one, *Yoshimatsu Banjo's* *Godzilla vs the Smog Monster* is.) Kitamura's skill and dexterity is never in doubt, that he has tremendous ability cannot be denied; the problem could be said to be to what ends he puts this ability.

*Final Wars* is basically three spectacular movies that they've tried to pack into one, and it often seems as if none of those stories even knew how to shake hands, let alone embrace into a comprehensive tale, and one repeatedly gets the sense that Kitamura's real directive here is not to have made a proper 50th Anniversary Godzilla movie, but to cobble together a product reel showing why he should be directing Hollywood

action movies.

I must say that in this regard, Kitamura has succeeded completely. I have never seen more elaborate stunts work in a Japanese movie ever, except... this is human stunt work. No one goes to a Godzilla movie to see a gigantic motorcycle chase that seems to go on for about twenty minutes, no matter how brilliantly it's done, though perhaps I'd find the sequence more bravura if I even cared about these characters (mutant soldiers, one enslaved by aliens) in the first place. I really don't want to see another eighty minutes of Manzûki-like fight scenes... though maybe I would if there was anything even vaguely resembling character development, or even characterization, in the first place.

Kitamura spends so much time on this kind of thing that the manner in which he cuts the monster sequences is often borderline insulting. This movie is over two hours long (as far as I recall, the longest running Japanese monster movie ever), and is packed with lengthy fight scenes between humans and human-looking aliens, and these parts, however amazingly well done, become particularly annoying because they seem to be eating up so much screen time that should be devoted to the real reason we watch these things: THE GIANT MONSTERS.

Granted, I thought the last entry in the series *Tokyo SOS* was a drag and a half, and this movie represents something more entertaining, but it's absolutely shocking how cavalierly Kitamura treats so many of these sequences; this was sold as the *Destroy All Monsters* of our new era, and while some of the chaos of this comes through beautifully at times, it's often infuriating how the director seems to pick and choose, completely inexplicably, amongst what he decides he wants to show us and what he doesn't. I think the editing is actually superb from the technical point of view, but why does he not show us so much stuff we want to see?

Many sequences are just astounding at the beginning: Rodan's attack on New York, Anguirus bouncing through acres of buildings, the mammoth shrimp Ebirah having a showdown with

mutant soldiers (the best *Ultraman* episode that was never made), and I'm only naming three of the beasties who turn up in this (you have to be really dedicated to the series to even recognize who most of these guys are, I suspect). But then we get stupid, cheap stuff like the way Hedorah, the Smog Monster, is polished off within less than a minute, and the way the movie never bothers to tell us whether some of these critters are even definitively vanquished. (One gorgeous long shot, of Rodan, King Caesar and Anguirus all in a pile, after one of the picture's better monster action sequences, wherein Godzilla is of course victorious, misses so many moments it's like an ache you can't get rid of to watch it again; you just know that Eiji Tsuburaya or Tetsuyoshi Nakano would have inserted close-ups of their eyes fading or something, hell, even Noriaki Yuasa would have done as much.)

This must sound as if I'm angry with the picture, and at some levels I am, perhaps all the more so because of all the stuff that works so well. I do think Kitamura is a first-class director, I have not seen his work before, but I wish he had taken less of a punk-rock attitude (as I see it) to what should have been a tribute, not a strange sort of mockery. Who didn't love the idea of this movie when we first heard of it? All those monsters coming back, how cool is that? Yet there seems to be so much almost deliberate misjudgment in the way it's executed, what, after three viewings am I going to say? On the one hand I'm delighted to see such a modern-looking, handsomely produced entry into the series; none of the movies since 1984 have been made with so much money, and I'll tell ya, for the reported \$18 million that this cost, plus extra CGI work and title design commissioned from Hollywood (the latter executed by Seven's own Kyle Cooper, although I can't fathom why he - or Kitamura - decided it should go by so fast and be so hard to read), your average Hollywood movie that attempted this would cost at least three times as much, I bet. But again, to what end?

There are many things to love here, and I bet

some of the things I'll single out will surprise people. The score by Keith Emerson (of Emerson, Lake & Palmer) actually somehow works for this ideally, it's exactly the score this weird picture wants and I can't imagine anything else that would match its tone so well. (Two Japanese composers, Kitamura uses a lot are also credited, but I have no idea who wrote what.) What we're allowed to see of special effects director Etsushi Asada's work is first-class, and there are many brilliant ideas in the monster sequences (one of the frustrating things about the movie is that I never understood why we get tons of one such scene and maybe a fingerful of another). I admired the much-dodged, vaguely decolorized photography of the human scenes, and the sets were terrific.

As well, the acting is mostly terrific. I thought for a while there that Kitamura was going for realism, and then I recognized his style is actually "heightened realism," though not all the leads are up to it. But the supporting players are ideally chosen. I don't know if Akira Takarada, who starred in the original (it was only his third film and his first as a lead) has had a better role in decades; he plays a UN functionary who turns into an alien-controlled

freak, and for a man pushing 80, he looks terrific, and is clearly enjoying himself immensely, as he certainly didn't seem to be doing in his phoned-in semi-bit-part in *Godzilla vs. *Mothra** (1992). As well, genre goddess Kumi Mizuno, not as old as Takarada but despite her age still looking gorgeous (she has fortunate cheekbones and a still-lovely smoky voice) has more to do in this genre part than she's been granted since her own youth. Kenji Sasaki (who also appeared, for a split second, in the original *Godzilla*) is more shortchanged as usual, but man, always great to see him. Latter-day character favorite Akira Nakao also has a limited but nifty part.

However, the performance kudos really belong to Kazuki Kitamura (no relation to director Ryûhei, as far as I know), who pretty much steals every scene he's in as the haughty, egoistic alien who casually kills his superiors and takes over the show (and goes into repeated, increasingly hysterical fits every time *Godzilla* slaughters one of his deployed monsters), and Don Frye, not really an actor (as his line readings indicate), but a hell of a presence; I was not surprised to discover later that he is originally a professional athlete, since I did wonder how someone so beefy moved so fast in

those action scenes.

Frye always seems to be in on some joke that the rest of us aren't, and when in the film's final act he more or less says "We're going to wake up *Godzilla* just to screw with the aliens, even though almost everybody else on earth is dead," the picture's indifferent nihilism almost obtains a sort of screwball comedy.

And screwball comedy is not what should have been attempted in this barely explicable, so-called tribute to Tomoyuki Tanaka, Ishirô Honda and Eiji Tsuburaya, but if nothing else, I can't say the thing is boring. Disappointing? I guess so. Yet I wonder how time will judge this particular entry in this particular and unusual series; it's so rare for anyone on the staff to have tried something so radical and different, and enough of it works that I don't think it automatically to be dismissed. If I could have been there to review *Godzilla vs. the Smog Monster* when it came out, might I have hated it? I did as a child. As an adult, I think it a masterpiece of sorts. I think I'll never think of *Godzilla: Final Wars* as a masterpiece, but I can't deny there's tons of brilliant filmmaking in it; I just, again and for the last time, wish that it had been focused a bit more clearly. ■



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the making of

# PT 109

how hollywood helped spin the

## kennedy legend



Cliff Robertson as John F. Kennedy in *PT 109*

The meteoric political rise of John Fitzgerald "Jack" Kennedy — the protagonist of our tale — in fact began with a shame-faced debacle aboard patrol-torpedo boat 109 in the South Pacific during World War II. Kennedy was a 26-year-old Navy lieutenant in charge of the fast-moving, 80-foot PT boat, one of over 600 such vessels defending the South Pacific. In the moonless midnight blackness of August 1, 1943, Kennedy's 109 was rammed and sunk by a Japanese destroyer. Two of 12 crew members drowned; Kennedy led the survivors to safety, swimming island to island until help arrived.

The incident left Jack Kennedy deeply

ashamed. He should have been; in the entire history of World War II, the 109 was the only PT boat ever rammed and sunk by a Japanese destroyer. There were even whispers of a possible court-martial on grounds of dereliction of duty.

Enter Joseph P. Kennedy, Jack's dad.

Joe was one of the richest blokes in America and a pioneer in the Art of the Spin — former bootlegger, stock manipulator, and Hollywood producer. It was Joe's dream to put a son in the White House, and to that end he unleashed a juggernaut of publicity designed to sell his oldest surviving son to the American public.

Joe persuaded Pulitzer-winning author

he was our nation's first cult president, an impossible combination of leading-man looks, political savvy, and boundless personal charm. Not surprisingly, he was the first living President of the United States to be the subject of a major motion picture.

The inside story of the making of that picture, *PT 109* — America's first marriage of presidential politics and Hollywood filmmaking — illustrates the principle that in Washington as in Tinseltown, it's all about the Art of the Spin.

John Hersey, a Kennedy confidant (his wife was Jack's ex-steady) to write an article for *The New Yorker* focusing on his son's efforts to lead the stranded PT crew to safety. The resulting article portrayed Jack as the Dashing Naval Hero, Leader of Men.

When Jack ran for Congress in 1947 — his first-ever campaign — the elder Kennedy circulated 150,000 copies of Hersey's story to Massachusetts voters. The returning WWII hero was elected with ease. Four years later, Jack was elected to the Senate. And in 1960...well, you know the rest.

### THE SEARCH FOR JFK

Joe Kennedy's behind-the-scenes machinations may have succeeded in putting a son in

CULT MOVIES



the Oval Office, but the elder Kennedy wasn't done spinning the *PT 109* legend just yet.

In 1961, Joe successfully pitched the idea for a feature film based on his son's WWII exploits to pal Jack Warner of Warner Brothers Studios. Joe handled contract negotiations himself, receiving approval over both script and selection of the actor to portray JFK.

Warner Brothers immediately began testing dozens of actors for the part of young Kennedy, including Peter Fonda, Roger Smith, Chad Everett – even Edd "Kookie" Byrnes (of *77 Sunset Strip* fame) was considered. JFK himself favored Warren Beatty – who turned down the part.

Hollywood buzzed with conjecture: Which lucky leading man would snare the part of young Kennedy? Cliff Robertson would later recall his shock at being summoned to the Warners lot for a screen test. In his wildest dreams, he told a reporter, he never put himself in the mix.

No wonder: Robertson was 37-years-old and possessed none of the Kennedy charisma. Nonetheless, two days after testing he received a phone call from a friend in

New York. "There's a picture of you and President Kennedy on the front page of the *New York Times*," the actor was told. "You've got the part."

Unbeknownst to Robertson, Warner Brothers had shipped each of the actors' tests to Paul Fischer, White House projectionist, who played them for Kennedy and his brother-in-law Peter Lawford Kennedy selected Robertson.

Within weeks, Robertson received an invitation to 600 Pennsylvania Avenue. During their 45-minute confab, JFK made two requests. First, he asked the actor to switch the part in his hair from left to right. Then he told Robertson to forget the Boston accent, to play the part, in JFK's words, "non-regional," fearful that any actor attempting his veddy proper *Hah-wahd* inflection risked sounding ridiculous. To drive home the point, Kennedy actually performed a brief impersonation of a bad nightclub comic impersonating him –

"*Allah, not what you-ah country can do for you.*" Robertson apparently got the message. As a parting gift, JFK gave Robertson a *PT 109* tie clasp.

Next, Team Kennedy turned its attention to selecting a director. Warner's original choice, Raoul Walsh, was a once-great director whose 1928 film *Regeneration* had starred Gloria Swanson, Joe Kennedy's long-time mistress. But Walsh hadn't made a decent picture in years – decades, actually.

JFK's Press Secretary Pierre Salinger was skeptical, and asked Warner to send Walsh's most recent picture – the hokey *Let's Go Marines* – to the White House for screening. On the afternoon of Feb. 23, 1962, JFK took a seat in the projection room alongside Salinger. Ten minutes into the film, JFK had seen enough. He leaned over and whispered in Salinger's ear. Salinger stood, waved his arms, and shouted to Fischer to stop the film.

According to witnesses, Kennedy then

by ken brooks

# PT 109

turned to Salinger and said, "Tell Jack Warner to go f\*\*\* himself."

Kennedy ultimately agreed to the selection of Lewis Milestone, who was replaced mere weeks into the film by Les Martinson [see the following David Whorf interview - Ed].

Florida shipyards from Panama City to Miami began converting Air Force rescue vessels into PT boats, which had long since become obsolete. In waters east of Panama City, one fleet of faux-PTs - suspected of being a Cuban flotilla - was stopped and searched by the US Coast Guard.

Island scenes were shot at Munson Island off Key West, and at Little Palm Island, an ultra-private, exclusive retreat halfway between Marathon and Key West. There was no electricity on Little Palm, so Joe Kennedy persuaded the state of Florida to install 3.5 miles of utility poles for the shoot.

The film, budgeted at \$5 million, was completed in 11 weeks.

## THE VIEW FROM CAMELOT

The President and First Lady screened *PT*



Cliff Robertson and Robert Culp in *PT-109*

*109* for the first time on Jan. 29, 1963, in the White House projection room. The next day JFK watched it again along with 35 White House staff members. According to Fischer's records, brothers Ted and Bobby watched the

film on May 20, 1963; two days later the president's children, John-John, 3, and Caroline, 6, were shown the film as well.

The movie premiered on July 3, 1963, at the posh Beverly Hills Hilton, the first

## INTERVIEW: PT-109's DAVID WHORF

David Whorf was a 28-year-old up-and-coming actor when he won the role of Seaman First-clas Raymond Albert in *PT 109*. David is the son of Richard Whorf, whose Hollywood directorial credits include 1946's *To the Clouds Roll By*, a musical bio of Jerome Kern starring Judy Garland and Frank Sinatra, and 1950's *Champagne for Caesar*, a wonderful, much-overlooked spoof of TV quiz shows starring Ronald Coleman and Celeste Holm. Recently, *Cult Movies* talked with David Whorf about his role in *PT 109*, and his career as both actor and assistant director.

**Cult Movies:** How did you become involved with *PT 109*?

**David Whorf:** Warner Brothers had a number of second-generation kids working on the film. Supreme Court Justice William Douglas' son William, Jr. played Gerald Zinser, one of the PT crew members, and Bob Hope's son, Tony, worked in production. I was at an age where I was just right for the part of Raymond Albert. Still, I auditioned just like any other actor.

**CM:** What do you remember about the production?

**DW:** We were out on the water in these air-sea

rescue boats converted to look like PTs. A number of times during the shoot we saw Cubans floating from Cuba to Florida in the middle of the ocean - inner tubes, boxes, anything that could float. They would try to give themselves up to us. We kept saying: "No, no - we're just making a movie. We're not the real Navy!"

We shot on location at Munson Key. Warner Brothers arrived months in advance and built a large set that covered the island so that various sides of it could pass for different islands. As soon as we finished shooting, the Cuban Missile Crisis happened, so the locations we had used just days before were suddenly filled with rocket launchers and such.

**CM:** Leslie Martinson wasn't the original director, was he?

**DW:** No. Lewis Milestone was the original director. In fact, most of the actors signed on because of Milestone. The

man was a true titan of the industry - he'd won an Academy Award with *All Quiet on the Western Front*, one of the all-time great films, and we all felt deeply towards him. But he was an older man and from time to time he'd take a snooze in his chair - never during a scene, mind you. But Byram Foy, the producer, didn't think he was up to the task. It was a shame because Milestone was all class. But Foy had him replaced. When Martinson came aboard it



Whorf in  
*PT 109*

by Ken Brooks

was a stacked deck against him - as it would have been for anyone at that point, because we all felt loyalty to Milestone.

Martinson was a trip. There's a scene near the end of the movie where Kennedy returns to the island aboard a boat to rescue his men. He shoots his rifle as a signal and we all come tumbling out of the jungle and swim towards the boat. Martinson was up on the boat with a loudspeaker, trying to create a mood, screaming: "You are the children of Israel! You are being delivered, you children of Israel!" We looked at each other and rolled our eyes - it was hard to keep from cracking up. We were like, "Why doesn't he just shut up and let us do the scene?" **CM:** Did any representatives from the White House attend the shooting?

**DW:** I never saw any official White House people. But we met the actual surviving crew members, all of whom came to Florida and spent time on the set. President Kennedy never came down - that disappointed me.

**CM:** The credits read: "Under the personal supervision of Jack Warner." Did Warner ever visit the set?

**DW:** No. He may have had an influence in the making of the film, but those shenanigans happen a million miles from the actors on the set.

**CM:** Perhaps the most powerful scenes in the film involve your character, Raymond Albert.

**DW:** My scenes kind of evolved. The writers said, "We're looking for something we don't have yet" - they wanted some raw emotion, I guess. But they didn't have much freedom with

# PT 109

major motion picture premiere not held in a theater. This was, after all, a \$100-a-ticket, black-tie gala to raise money for the Joseph P. Kennedy Child Care Center in Santa Monica. JFK did not attend. In his stead: Mother Rose Kennedy, sisters Pat Lawford (and husband Peter) and Eunice Shriver (and husband Sargent). "Biggest cheer of the evening," reported *Newsweek*, "came not during the picture but at a preceding dinner when 100 waiters marched in bearing ice-cream cakes topped with gummetal-gray plastic models of *PT 109*."

## DAVID WHORF

the characters, except for the one I played. I was lucky in one respect: The character I was portraying — Raymond Albert — did not survive the war, so they had some freedom to be creative with him.

The scene on the island, where I smash the lantern in a fit of rage, was not that difficult to prepare for. But the apology scene (in which Albert apologizes to JFK, post-rescue, for angrily doubting him)...well, they wanted me to cry. Try though I might, I wasn't able to get a tear out. So I opted instead for shame, embarrassment, and anger at myself. I worked on those emotions — and I'd have to say it seemed to come across effectively.

It was tough to prepare for that scene. That day I tried to keep away from the idle chitchat of the rest of the cast and concentrated on getting into a dark mood, working myself into a real downer-trip — down, down, down. Then, when it was time to shoot, the trick was to avoid letting all the distractions on the set — the hammers, the grips, the electricians — get in the way of maintaining my focus. I'd say my scenes turned out favorably and I was very pleased with my performance.

CM: What about the rest of the cast?

DW: It was a great cast except for Ty Hardin. The man was a loose cannon, a real coo-coo. We used to refer to him as "Try Harder." There was one scene he just couldn't get straight. He kept forgetting that we were fighting the Japanese, not the Indians. He was on the boat saying: "Yep, we're gonna get those Indians..." Marlon would yell, "CUT! Ty, we're fighting the Japanese." Ty would up making the same mistake about seven times. The rest of us stood around just rolling our eyes.

CM: What was Robert Blake like at that point in his career?

DW: He hated to be called Bobby or Bob — it had to be Robert. And he hated for anyone to know he'd been Little Beaver (the Indian sidekick in the 1940s *Red Ryder* serial). Blake was always an angry guy. I didn't know the source of his anger, but I sensed a dark side — everyone did. He carried a fistful of explosive, deep-seated angst

The film opened to less than sterling reviews. The *New York Times* called Robertson's performance "pious, pompous, and self-righteously smug," and dismissed the story as "synthetic and without the feel of truth." *Newsweek's* review, entitled "Jack the Skipper," offered: "Robertson doesn't look, act, or talk like (Kennedy) — still, one must believe as with Santa Claus."

*PT 109* was only a moderate box office draw. It was, after all, a novelty: The first film ever made about a living president — and an enormously popular prez, at that. The film abruptly ended its run in November of 1963; Warner Brothers yanked the film following Kennedy's assassin-

sation on November 22.

"I had hoped (*PT 109*) would be something of a classic," the late George Stevens (a Kennedy family friend and director of *Giant*, *Shane*, and *A Place in the Sun*, among others) told reporters in 1974. "But it was not a very exceptional one." The Kennedys liked the film a great deal, Stevens recalled, and that was important in the end.

Ultimately, it was Jack Kennedy — the master ironist — who cut through the fog of myth and publicity created by his father, Spinmeister Joe.

Once, when asked how he managed to become a naval hero, JFK replied: "It was easy. They sunk my boat." ■

around with him, but he used it to good effect his whole career. He and I hit it off right away and got along great, which was a strange-bedfellows situation because we were so different. We actually became good friends, and Robert and his first wife Sonora and I socialized regularly for about six months after wrapping *PT 109*. Then we drifted in separate ways. His current dilemma is shocking and I frankly don't know what to think.

CM: What did you think of Robertson's performance as JFK?

DW: It was a bit reserved, but I think Robertson must have felt like he was walking a tightrope. He was portraying a standing president — something that had never been done before — and I don't think he wanted to insult the president in any way. I thought generally Cliff did a good job. He was lovely to work for. I still admire the man.

CM: Did you attend the premiere?

DW: No. That was a black-tie gala for biggies. But let me tell you about the first time I saw the film in a theater with a live audience. We have this sequence in the film where Kennedy is rescuing Marlon off one of the island beaches. We see that Kennedy's PT boat has lost gas and is drifting towards the shore and the Japanese are running to the edge of the beach with their mortars and machine guns. The boat is going to drift right into them and get shot to pieces. The film cuts back and forth. The guys are sweating. The boat is drifting. The Japs are coming. Well, sitting behind me in the theater was a young boy, couldn't have been more than nine or ten. He turned to his father and said, "Gee, Dad, why don't they just drop an anchor?" I laughed so hard I choked, and I've never been able to watch that sequence again without laughing. I mean, it was so stupid that we didn't think of that. Out of the mouths of babes!

CM: Were you happy with the response to *PT 109*?

DW: The movie was only a moderate success. What has been terrific is that the film still plays somewhere on cable several times

every year. It has attained almost legend-like status over the years because of its association with the Kennedys. Of course, at this point, my annual residuals are down to about \$4.53.

CM: Tell us about your other film roles.

DW: My first motion picture was *On Our Merry Way*. This was around 1945 and I was eleven years old. A family friend, an actor and producer, requested me for the part of Sniffles Duggan. I read and they said, "He's terrific." But by the time the movie was released in '48 my voice had changed. When I saw the film I was so embarrassed I wanted to hide behind the theater seat. I thought: "My lord, is that my squeaky little voice?" My shoot only lasted two weeks so I didn't really interact with Jimmy Stewart or Henry Fonda. I had some scenes with Fred McMurray, though, which was interesting because later in my Dad's career he directed Fred in *My Three Sons*.

In the 1960s I appeared in *On Way Home*, but you'll have to forgive me for that one. The only thing good about it was the free trip to Hawaii — and I was able to afford a new car afterwards. Then I made *Twist All Night*, which was one of those B-movie nine-day wonders, made during the twist craze. Louis Prima was fun. But the movie? Bad. Bad. Bad.

So I worked as a 2nd Assistant Director and continued my acting career, bit parts here and there — a *Hazel*, a *Dr. Kildare*. But it was frustrating. As a young actor, I'd fight real hard for a part and then get on the set and sit around for five or six hours until they'd get to me. By that time my energy was gone. I liked the theater much better, so I spent a lot of time in the theater, in summer stock, in both New England and Denver. I enjoyed that tremendously.

CM: What was it like on the set of *Caddyshack*?

DW: I was First Assistant director. Actually, I replaced somebody

(cont'd.)

David Whorf, 2003

## INTERVIEW: DAVID WHORF

cont'd.

and had one day to prep and get ready. I figured I could handle it, but the cocaine was flying all over the place — the set was a zoo. And the movie that came out had nothing at all to do with the movie we shot. Bill Murray didn't show up until we were about three-fourths of the way through. He came down for four days and changed the whole thing, made stuff up, basically winged it. The gopher wasn't even in the movie I shot. When I finally saw the film I was like, "What movie is this?"

*Coldyshock* was Harold Ramis' first directing job, and he was a bit lost at times. I told him, "Just listen to your First Assistant Director — he'll tell you what to do." Turns out there's some really funny stuff in there, so it worked out fine.

CM: Are you currently involved in any projects? DW: I haven't done anything in a couple of years, mostly because everybody I used to work with is dead. The last thing I did was the first season of *CSI* as assistant director. I'd hoped to get some directing jobs out of it, but at my age — I'll be 70 soon — it would require too much traveling and time away from home. For years I worked as assistant director for Larry Pierce on shows like *Batman* and *Conan*, and it was terrific to feel such mutual respect and fun and laughter while we were working. That doesn't seem to happen much anymore, and I miss that.

CM: Tell us about your father, Robert Whorf.

DW: Dad started out stage in New York with the Theater Guild working with Lynn Fontaine and Alfred Lunt, and was involved in the Pulitzer Prize-winning plays of the 1930s. In the late '30s, Dad was brought to Hollywood to appear in *Keeper of the Flame* with Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn. We moved to Hollywood for good in May 1941 when Dad appeared in Warner Brothers' *Blues in the Night*. He continued his acting career during the war years but gradually turned to directing. He was a man of tremendous talent, as an actor, director, painter, sculptor, costume designer. Dad was a hard act to follow.

CM: We appreciate your time, Mr. Whorf.

DW: Let me tell you one last *PT 109* story. The late Sammy Reese played one of the *PT* crewmen, and he and I became friends. Sammy told me he had written to President Kennedy and had gotten an autographed picture. I said, "Oh my gosh, I'd love to have one of those." So I wrote Kennedy a letter.

Of course, on Friday, Nov. 22, 1963, Kennedy was shot. The next day when the postman arrived I noticed his hands were shaking. He was holding an envelope marked The White House. Inside was a letter of thanks from Kennedy's secretary Evelyn Lincoln. Then I pulled out the photo. It was signed, "Warmest regards, Jack Kennedy." ■

# Lunden De'Leon

**C**ult Movies readers will perhaps best know actress Lunden De'Leon as the sexy tribal leader in William Winckler's 2001 *Russ Meyer* tribute/spoof, *The Double-D Avenger*. But internationally, this South Carolina-born beauty is most recognized for her part of Joanne Mbutu on the hit German television series *Vital Signs*.

De'Leon's other film credits include *Surviving Paradise* (2000), *Faux Pas* (2001), *Crypts* (2002), and *Undercover* (2003).

"In all these movies I'm portraying evil, manipulative, kick-butt women, but once the cameras are down, I'm just your regular southern belle," says De'Leon.

Besides acting, De'Leon has graced the pages of numerous magazines, including *Swimsuit Illustrated*. She has also appeared in music videos for such artists as Michael Jackson, Lenny Kravitz, and The Temptations. ■



CULT MOVIES

A

# Lost

## Lugosi Dracula

# Found

BY FRANK J. DELLO STRITTO

As regular readers of *Cult Movies Magazine* may know, whenever possible I track down and document Bela Lugosi's stage performances, particularly in his signature role, Dracula. Thanks to a tip from horror movie collector and fan Lee Hurns, the actor's hitherto forgotten week of performing *Dracula* in Winooski, Vermont (two miles north of Burlington) has been uncovered.

Lee owns a rare wax disc recording of Lugosi's reading of "Cask of Amontillado." The label on the disc gives no date, but is marked "WCAX - Burlington, Vermont." A rummaging through the archives of the *Burlington Free Press* turned up Lugosi's appearance at St. Michael's Playhouse for July 4 through July 8, 1950.

The new find increases Lugosi's total tally of documented *Dracula* stage appearances to 818 (in the full Deane-Balderton play, not including the abbreviated versions that he sometimes performed on the Vaudeville circuits). Lugosi's five performances in July 1950 are also his only known live appearance in Vermont, and his last documented appearance in the United States in *Dracula*. In 1951 he did play in *Dracula* for six months in Britain, but he is not known to have played Dracula again in America.

Bela Lugosi is seen here preparing his makeup for a stage performance. Classic horror expert Frank J. Dello Stritto has recently uncovered a little-known period of Lugosi's theatre career.



Winooski's St. Michael's Playhouse, home of the Ethan Allan Players, was part of the "summer stock circuit" that veteran actors like Lugosi worked in the decade after World War II. Those years were the last before air-conditioning made the steamy cities more bearable during the hot months and allowed theatres in the big cities to remain open through the summer. Post-war city dwellers abandoned summer urban life in droves for mountain and

Cont'd. on page 90

TAKE IT OFF!  
TAKE IT OFF!  
RAH RAH RAH!



GETTIN' DOWN  
A N D  
GETTIN' IT ON  
W I T H

'70s  
CHEERLEADER  
MOVIES



BY JOE  
WAWRZYNIAK

**N**ow, we all know that cheerleaders have a notorious reputation for being easy lays. Y'know, the kind of loose, flighty gals who'll dish out for any leering, licentious horny-toad dude who makes some moves on 'em. The following '70s drive-in films for the most part gladly adhere to this politically incorrect, but long-standing stereotype, milking the intrinsically trashy concept of cheerleaders as never-too-reluctant-to-boff sex-machines for all it's worth.

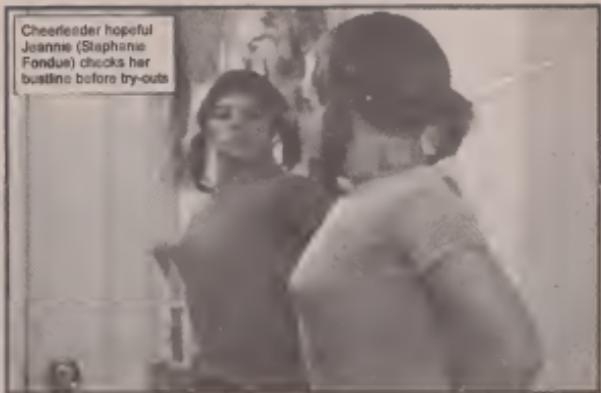
For those who just have to read some additional sociological insight into movies — regardless of whether or not said movies really need to have some extra heavy-duty meaningful nonsense ascribed to them at all — I guess one could credibly surmise that the '70s cheerleader cycle was the shocking (yet somehow still weirdly logical) single most extreme cinematic example of the Swingin' '70s Sexual Revolution at its most crazily permissive and uninhibited. After all, if a lot of adults were gettin' it on with one another, one can safely assume that a bunch of adolescents in their mid to late teens were likewise doing the horizontal rhumba with multiple partners as well. Now, with that stuffed-shirt intellectual hokey out of the way, let's get down to brass tacks and delve into the films themselves.

## THE CHEERLEADERS (1972)

The film that got the whole soft-core cheerleader teen comedy genre ball rolling — and boy what an endearingly dippy start! The plot, such as it is, revolves around the five highly experienced cheerleader squad members of Amorosa High School in California who help a virgin sixth new member get her cherry popped. (Interestingly enough, a majority of cheerleader pics take place in California, thereby suggesting that the Golden State was a veritable hotbed of blithely brash'n'brazen anything-goes hedonistic activity.) As usual, it's not the story that really counts; what makes this blissfully braindead affair so worthwhile are the following things:

- A) A never-ending barrage of gratuitous nudity
- B) An incessantly lewd'n'crude sense of humor (I especially enjoyed the toe sucking gag)
- C) Tirelessly moronic dialogue ("You look

Cheerleader hopeful  
Jeanne (Stephanie  
Fondue) checks her  
buttocks before try-outs



like a hag from the rag bag"), and

D) An upbeat, lighthearted air that ensures that watching this beaut is a quick, peppy, fun experience.

Stephanie Fondue, Denise Dillaway, Jonita Bush, Sandy Evans, Brandy Woods, and Kim Stanton — all of whom are cute, shapely, and sexy — are most appealing as the teetering airheads (and they all get naked quite a lot, too). The sex scenes happen at regular intervals of roughly ten minutes and take place in an amusing assortment of different places: a car wash, a fast food joint, the driver's seat of a moving school bus (!), even on somebody's lawn.

The technical credits are pretty so-so. There's flat acting (Patrick Wright, who played Sheriff Mack in the godawful stinkbomb *Track of the Moonbeam*, delivers the film's liveliest performance as a lecherous macho dude football coach), poorly synched

sound, adequate direction by Paul Glicker, and rough, scratchy, basic cinematography by Richard Lerner (the constant use of wipes and freeze frames is lovably primitive).

But David Herman comes through loud and clear with an infectiously zippy score which alternates between cardamom-splitting fuzztone-drenched acid rock and zesty bubblegum pop slop (the too-goofy-for-words theme song "I Like What You're Doing to Me" won't get out of your head for at least a week).

Lerner, who not only photographed this dilly but also co-produced and co-wrote the original story as well, later directed the even more delightfully duffy *Revenge of the Cheerleaders*, which rates as the creme de la creme of crud.

Too cheerfully dopey to hate, *The Cheerleaders* is a very agreeable and enjoyable beginning for this admittedly immaterial,



Cheerleader Debbie  
(Brandy Woods) gets  
a golf lesson from a  
lecherous parent

but always entertaining subgenre.

Funky factoid: Talie Cochrane, the actress wife of Patrick Wright who's best known for her scary nude dance scene in the Manson-inspired evil hippie opus *The Love Thrill Murders*, worked behind the scenes on this mama, doing hair and make-up. And, best of all, it was released by the late, great Jerry Gross, who frequently double-billed this baby with either *Fritz the Cat* or *Flesh Gordon*.

## THE SWINGING CHEERLEADERS (1974)

Special credit must go to the ever-surprising and enterprising Jack Hill for making the single most wickedly subversive film in this particular subgenre. Sure, it certainly delivers the prerequisite ample doses of silly slapstick humor and tasty T&A, but along with that sleazy stuff we also have a remarkably astute critique of gender roles and sexual stereotypes as well as a deliciously sly and playful sense of anarchic humor.

Sassy Mesa University underground newspaper reporter Kate (wonderfully played by lovely blonde sprite Jo Johnston) decides to pose as a cheerleader to get the straight dope for an article on "female exploitation in contemporary society." Kate soon discovers that there's much more to cheerleaders than just sexy short skirts and fluffy pom-poms. They're really troubled individuals with serious issues: Sweet Rainbeaux Smith is a frustrated virgin who's eager to get laid, Colleen Camp is a snooty, stuck-up rich bitch who always gets what she wants, and Rosanne Katon (*Playboy's* September '78 Playmate of the Month) is having an affair with a married college professor. The seemingly cocky and sexist star football player turns out to be a nice, sensitive guy and the allegedly radical hippie college newspaper editor ultimately gets exposed as a hypocritical, misogynistic phony. Moreover, both the shady campus dean and duplicitous football coach are really involved in a numbers racket. Wow, talk about campus unrest!

Besides the unusually sound plot and provocative sociopolitical subtext (both very rare and welcome qualities in the often schlocky and strictly superficial cheerleader subgenre), *The Swinging Cheerleaders* further boasts a wonderfully lush'n'plush look, uniformly solid acting, nifty policemen bits by crusty character thesp John Quade and veteran Hollywood stuntman Bob Minor (who also popped up in both *Coffy* and *Foxy*

Brown for Jack Hill), and a hilariously wild'n'wacky slapstick finale.

Clips from this gem are featured in the acclaimed Errol Morris documentary *The Thin Blue Line*.

## THE POM POM GIRLS (1976)

This strangely lackluster Crown International offering was a massive drive-in success, but alas, it barely earns passing marks as a merely acceptable timewaster. The main problem with this pic is that too much emphasis is put on the supposedly funny, but more often dumb and annoying hotrod-racing antics of Palisades High School students Robert Carradine and Michael Mallins. The much more luscious and enticing female stars Lisa Reeves and Jennifer Ashley are relegated to secondary status, while the always appreciative and invigorating presence of the immensely angelic and adorable Rainbeaux Smith is shamefully wasted in a piddly-ass small part. Worse yet, this isn't anywhere near as raunchy or energetic as most entries in this genre.

Only a slight smattering of skin and the sporadic hoppin' moment (two couples tumbling down a hill, the mandatory chicks-peeling-out-of-their-threads locker room scene, the climactic *Rebel Without A Cause*-inspired chicken car race) alleviate the general tedium.

Still, dependably gruff character actor James Gammon makes for a marvelously hateful villain as a brutish football coach. And Reeves, Ashley, Smith, Diane Lee Hart, and Susan Player Jarreau are all real easy on the eyes (and all of 'em take off their clothes, albeit only very briefly). The film does kill 90 minutes in a relatively painless manner.

Director Joseph Ruben eventually graduated to bigger and better things with the superior '80s thrillers *The Stepfather* and *True Believer*.

## REVENGE OF THE CHEERLEADERS (1975)

When a greedy dorkamander land developer threatens to raze Aloha High School to make room for a shopping center and force the affluent California-based educational institution to merge with a nearby vocational



at school the five members of the Aloha High cheerleader squad resort to various drastic tactics (e.g., spiking the cafeteria spaghetti sauce with booze and grass) in order to thwart the bastard. That's about it for the plot – and, frankly, who really cares about some stankin' no-good plot? What matters is if this darling delivers the expected lowbrow drive-in trash movie goods. I'm happy to say that it does.

Jeri Woods (she was one of the black revolutionaries in Jack Hill's imperishable *Switchblade Sisters*), a pregnant, pou-bellied Rainbeaux Smith (Rainbeaux at one point does a fairly startling pre-Demi Moore burn-in-the-oven nude scene), Susie Elene, July '76 *Penthouse* Pet Helen Lang, and especially the gorgeous, slender blonde minx Patrice Rohmer all dispose quite often so they can show off their sexy, sausious, sizzling stuff.

A pre-stardom David Hasselhoff makes an enormous ass out of himself in his less-than-sterling film debut as "Boner," a totally sex-crazed cretin who earns his namesake from his perpetually raged, insatiable libido. Hard-core Hasselhoff haters will find his constant embarrassingly imbecile antics hugely amusing (I personally loved the bit where Hasselhoff's girlfriend gets him out of an unconscious stupor by placing her panties on his face!), but I must warn everyone: Dave actually has an all-out buck nekkid full-frontal shower nude scene!

Neither Richard Lerner's merely competent direction nor Nathaniel Dorsky's rather static cinematography are particularly impressive, but overall this one makes the grade; the gratuitous nudity and sex factor is pleasingly abundant, the gleefully nitwit humor shows no pretenses towards even a slight iota of sophistication (a sensible goat accidentally bastes a turkey with his own piss), John Sterling's catchy, poppy, slow-grindin' oh-so-70s synthesizer and wah-wah guitar heavy score might very well produce jolting, long-repressed Me Decade flashbacks, there's no less than four uproariously pathetic 'n' protracted disco dance sequences (Hasselhoff's jerky, spasmodic, highly arrhythmic sub-John Travolta boogie woogie moves are almost excruciatingly risible), the shockingly explicit female-to-male ass-eating scene will make your eyes pop right out of their sockets, and magician/actor Carl Ballantine of *McHale's Navy* fame has a nice

bit as the doddering old principal. Patrick Wright, who previously copped best acting honors in *The Cheerleaders*, has a funny cameo as an asshole cop and was the assistant director. Besides, there's no way in hell I'm going to be too hard on a flick that uses elaborately gaudy wipes and dissolves in order to cut from one scene to another and that boasts one of the greatest glaring continuity errors in dimwitted cinema history: two mysterious brunette girls who are never established as secondary characters magically appear out of nowhere to cut the rug with the rest of the gang for those previously cited disco dance sequences!

## SATAN'S CHEERLEADERS (1977)

Q: What can you say about a disastrously ill-advised would-be "high concept" entry in the cheerleader subgenre which clumsy incorporates elements from the then equally trendy devil worshipper genre, boasts a cast that includes such sadly slumming former luminaries as a fat-tired Yvonne De Carlo (*The Munsters*), a severely pickled John Ireland, an extremely cranky Jack Kruschen, and the ubiquitous John Carradine in one of his abjectly humiliating cameo parts, has almost no nudity to speak of (this wimpy atrocity is actually rated PG!), is directed with appalling ineptitude by chronically all-thumbs Al Adamson protégé Greydon Clark (*Without Warning*, *Joysticks*) and co-scripted with similarly shabby maladroitness by veteran exploitation hack screenwriter Alvin L. Fast (who also penned the so-as-wful-its-downright-awesome rocksploration hoot *Bummer!*), comes complete with a maddeningly irritating th-th-thumping discord score, features Lane Caillard (the lead in the delightfully danced-out rocksploration fave *Hangin' On A Star*) in a supporting role that never allows him to warble a single note, has script supervision by Debra Hill (future producer of *Halloween*) and was garishly photographed by soon-to-be big-deal cinematographer Dean (Romancing the Stone, Back to the Future) Cundey? A: Nothing remotely good, that's what!!!

## CHEERLEADERS' WILD WEEKEND (1979)

The cheerleader teen sexploitation comedy

subgenre receives an appropriately sleazy send-off with this satisfyingly tacky effort.

The plot is slight, but serviceable: three disgruntled former high school football star athletes, along with one jock's ditzy younger brother, and a ruthless lesbo school nurse abduct a bus full of big-breasted bimbo cheerleaders.

Once again, the story is pretty thin, and the film is more of a tense, straightforward suspense thriller rather than a goofy, innocuous comic romp. But the flick's exemplary trash pic credentials make it an essential entry in this article. Producer William Oso previously cranked out numerous porno films and later made the enjoyably execrable toxic waste monster cinkler *The Being*.

The bad kidnapper is played by Jason Williams, who any fairly with-it schlock movie hound knows as the title character in the immortal hard-core X-rated sci-fi romp *Flesh Gordon*. And *The Hills Have Eyes* survivors Robert Houston and Jesus Blythe are reteamed here. *Penitentiary* series star Leon Isaac Kennedy appears acting under the alias Lee Curtis as a disc jockey (Kennedy in reality worked as a disc jockey prior to embarking on a thespic career!). And the cheerleaders are portrayed by such scrumptious, often undraped seasoned junk flick vets as radiant blonde *Playboy* bunny Kristine DeBell (star of the hard-core fairytale item *Alice in Wonderland*), Elizabeth Halsey (the dirty musical movie version of *Cinderella*), Wally Anne Wharton (*Up In Smoke*), Lenka Novak (a.k.a. Hana Byro, *Coach*, *Vampire Hookers*), Tracy Ann King (a.k.a. Marilyn Joi, *Hammer*, *The Kentucky Fried Movie*), and Jamie Squire (the skinny-dipper who gets munched at the start of *Piranha*).

Jeff Werner's capable direction doesn't skimp on the good stuff: more gratuitous nudity than you can shake an erect penis at and lotsa gleefully gross low-brow humor (the cheerleaders tie their panties together so they can trip one of their abductors!). There's also a splendidly sulky laying-on-the-curdled-synthesizer-and-ear-rendering-wah-wah-guitar-something-nasty pseudo-disco score, a tasty topless beauty contest sequence, pot smoking, hideously bad soft-rock songs, hilariously dated '70s slang ("Why don't you shove it!"), and an absolute dearth of taste, subtlety, and artistic refinement. In short, it's da shit, dudes.

*Special thanks to Rob Hauschild, who was the first person to recognize this writer's talent and to give the writer his first big break.*

REVENGE OF THE CHEERLEADERS: (top to bottom) David Hasselhoff is "Boner," dance scene with a "mystery" cheerleader, Eddie Gale as Nurse Beam, and a fire extinguisher threat to the rival school by Gail (Jeri Woods)



# Monkee Madness, Sunset Strip Nights & the Penny Arkade

AN INTERVIEW WITH DON GLUT BY JAN ALAN HENDERSON



**A**rists have always suffered for their art. Don Glut is no exception. Known to most of fandom as a "Dinosaur Don," the guy who wrote the letters to *Famous Monsters* and *Screen Thrills* Illustrated in the early '60s, announcing his latest amateur movie with a bevy of photos. Don migrated to Los Angeles from Chicago in 1964, to attend film school at USC. With the likes of George Lucas at the school, it's no wonder Don would make some of the most interesting and entertaining amateur films, starring Hollywood character actors such as Ray Barcroft, Keene Duncan, and Glenn Strange.

Don began a writing career writing for Warner Publications, Marvel Comics, and editing *Modern Monster* magazine. He is also well known to *Star Wars* fans, having penned *The Empire Strike Back* novel.

Also an accomplished musician, Don had played in several bands before relocating to Los Angeles. This is where the suffering comes in.

After playing in several groups in the mid-60s, Don landed a gig with the Penny Arkade as a bass player. Even better, the Penny Arkade was the pet production of Monkee Mike Nesmith.

Now, most bands of this time period tried to emulate the flavor of the Beatles; the Penny Arkade was no exception. Don's nickname was "Marvel" due to his appreciation of the Fawcett Comics character "Captain Marvel." There was also a rumor that Don was a werewolf. (Remember, this was the '60s and everyone indulged!)

One magic night, things got a little out of hand, or should we say "paw." Don's lycanthropy was a practical joke, one that he and one of the band's roadies were in on. The band were enjoying a Hollywood full moon at Nesmith's house, when Don began to do the Larry Talbot boogie. He excused himself, and made an exit to his car, where he donned a Don Post werewolf mask, and paws made himself.

He returned to the party, and that's when the fur hit the fan. It seems that Mike Nesmith's dog "Frnk" (who was a police dog trained to respond to 25 different commands) decided to go wolf to wolf with Gruh's Don Post werewolf. While puncture wounds were inflicted to the ego as well as the posterior, the Penny Arkade continued to record and gig. After the better part of a year, the project was abandoned and the band disappeared. Attempts to resurrect the Arkade with different names and players proved futile.

But what of all the Nesmith-produced tracks

(a reported two LPs' worth)? Up until now, these recordings were thought to be lost.

With the help of Glut and former band members, Mike Nesmith and Sundazed Records, the Penny Arkade rides again. This band could be in the Ripley Book of Records for longest awaited record debut - 36 years.

Don reflected to *Cult Movies* on what it was like to be in a '60s band that had to wait 36 years for their album to hit the streets.

**GM:** How did you become interested in music?

**DG:** I've been involved in music since I was a kid. It's a strange thing; my father and his two brothers all had the ability to pick up any musical instrument, figure out how to play it, and then play any song that you could communicate the melody to them, by ear. I inherited that ability. My mother gave me piano lessons. I didn't realize at the time that I could play by ear. She took me to the movies, to see *The Third Man*. "The Third Man Theme," which is very haunting, became one of my favorites. I came home from the theater humming that song, walked over to the piano, and started playing it. That's when I realized I could play by ear.

**GM:** So when did you get the Rock'n'Roll bug?

**DG:** My uncles taught me how to play a few chords on guitar, and I had a couple of beat-up guitars around the house. Originally I didn't like rock music. I was one of those kids who wasn't good in sports, and didn't have a whole lot of friends. I could do things with Chicago, where I grew up, was a sports based city; most everybody was playing football and baseball, and I wasn't good at those things. I stayed on the sidelines a lot. An interesting thing happened. I knew this real popular kid, who told me, "Don, you gotta start dressing cool. Stop wearing those stupid corduroy pants, and get yourself a decent haircut. In 1957, something happened which changed my life. I saw Elvis on the *Tommy Dorsey* show. It was called *Stage Show*. He was still the raw Elvis, before Ed Sullivan cleaned him up and announced that he was a fine, decent boy. On the Dorsey show, Elvis looked dangerous - he looked like a hoodlum. I saw those girls screaming, and I said, "That's what I want!"

I changed my whole image from that day forward. I let my hair grow longer, greasing it back and everything, and I learned to play some of the songs Elvis was singing on the guitar, after seeing this TV performance.

Paul Klug lived at the end of my block. He

was in two things: one was a gang, and the other was the grammar school band, and played the drums. He came up to me one day and said, "Hey, maybe we should get together and play some music." It was through Paul that I really started playing rock and roll. He had borrowed a bass drum, a snare drum, and some sticks and things from the school basement (I don't know whether he ever gave them back). After that we started playing in his basement.

**GM:** What was your first band?

**DG:** The first real band was me and Paul, for a Christmas show. He had his drums and I had an acoustic guitar, and that was it. We did two songs, "Jail House Rock," and "Bye, Bye Love." We had a third guy who sang the leads, but didn't play anything. We were playing in a huge gymnasium. After that gig, I got a pickup to put in my acoustic guitar. I had a little amplifier that my father had. After that, we did a gig at a neighbor's lawn party, where we called ourselves The Rumbleheads. We wanted a name that sounded cool and tough. We knew four or five songs, which we played over and over again. They were all instrumental.

We worked with a singer named Carl Bonafede who sang with another band called the Gemstones, and sang with us as well. He eventually sort of made it big by revamping The Buckinghams, which was a Chicago group. After I moved to California in 1964, Carl got involved with The Buckinghams, reorganized them, put various members from various other groups together, and created The Buckinghams who had the '60s hits like "Kind of a Drag." He had cut some other records; one of them was called "Two Months Out of School," and another record called "Werewolf." I used to have a copy of "Werewolf."

When I got out here, and was in the USC dorms, I met a guy named Kim McKellar. Kim was a singer/guitar player, and was friends with the Ozzy and Harriet Nelsons. We were hanging out one day, and he mentioned to me that he sang and played guitar. We got together and jammed, I began harmonizing with him. We decided to get a band together. The band was originally called The Hustlers, which mutated into The Wicks. The Wicks had a small amount of success. While we never recorded anything professionally, we did cut a demo and went to Miami Beach and played a swank hotel during the 1965 Christmas holidays. We were still a cover band. We played a couple original songs that I wrote. I played lead guitar in the bands in Chicago, but when I got out here I switched to the bass. I had played a

Silvertone bass back in my days in Chicago. When I was working as The Wicks, I switched to bass permanently.

**CM:** So how did The Penny Arkade come about?

**DQ:** The Wicks eventually fizzled out. People were disgruntled over the fact that we weren't really going anywhere. We were signed with a record company (DEEM Records) and they told us they flat out they weren't going to do anything with us or for us anymore, and we had a two-year contract. We hooked up with Jim Mathews, the publisher of *Modern Monsters* magazine, which I was editing at the time. He had a music company, and so he got his lawyer to break the contract with DEEM Records. But the deal with Mathews went nowhere fast.

Sometime after that I was alerted to an ad on the bulletin board of the Musician's Union. The ad was for a bass player for a new band starting up, and I answered the ad. I went to the audition and met Chris Ducey and Craig Smith. They were a duo act. They had done a TV pilot in New York called *The Happenings*. They met Mike Nesmith while doing that show. I came into the situation when they were called Chris and Craig, and I was to be a bass player. We had managers, one who was named Sal Bonafede and Asher Dunn. I think Asher Dunn had something to do with The Doors in the early days. They managed us up to a point, and it dissolved. At one rehearsal, Mike Nesmith showed up. This was around the time that *The Monkees* television show was starting up. He listened to the band very closely, had a conversation with Chris and Craig, and then he left. Chris and Craig told me that Mike was somewhat interested in us, and if things didn't work out with Sal and Ash, Mike might come into the picture as a producer.

So after a long hiatus, I got a call from either Chris or Craig saying Mike Nesmith is involved, and we're going to be an official group, so come on down to Mike's house and meet everybody. Chris and Craig had brought in a new drummer called Bobby Donato. Bobby was the former drummer of The Bad Seeds out of Texas, and the four of us clicked.

Chris and Craig were the main writers of the Penny Arkade. They wrote together and apart. The one who wrote the song generally sang the lead vocal on it. We did a lot of recording and played all the local places like The Galaxy, Gazzari's, The Factory; we made the rounds in Hollywood. We were on a bill with The Fraternity of Man (who had the song "Don't Bogart That Joint" that was featured in the movie *Easy Rider*) at the Galaxy. We played at the Screen Gems Christmas party; we did an audition for the *Reynold Place* television show and almost got it – they wanted people who were freakier than we were. Mike Nesmith didn't want us to go to the real freaky route.

**CM:** Were there any Penny Arkade releases at the time? Singles, albums, whatever?

**DQ:** We did a lot of recording sessions – we probably recorded two dozen songs – but none of it was ever released. Reason being, our music was constantly changing, and by the time our audience was really interested, we had moved on to another level. Mike Nesmith had been talking to

Elektra on our behalf, Kama Sutra was another, I think even the Monkees label, Screen Gems. We never got to the point where everyone was satisfied enough to sign a contract, and I think Mike was holding out for a better deal too. The Penny Arkade recorded and gigged from 1967 to 1968.

Right before we broke up, Craig Smith made a lot of money because a number of songs were recorded by the last artists of the day, like Glen Campbell, Andy Williams. Some of the songs were in the Penny Arkade's repertoire. Glen Campbell recorded a song called "Country Girl," which is one of Craig's songs we recorded for our album. The Monkees did a track called "Salesman" that we used to play, but didn't record during our year in the studio. Andy Williams recorded a song that was written for Craig's girlfriend called "Holly."

Craig made a lot of money at one point. He came over to my house one day; just knocked on the door, I opened it, and it was Craig! He said, "I've got something to tell you. Sit down!" I did, and he said, "I'm leaving the Penny Arkade." He took that money and traveled the Orient, and got involved in some exotic things. Eastern philosophies and religions. He came back with his head shaved under the name Matreya. He turned into a very strange guy, and just disappeared from the picture. No one has heard from him since 1974. Recently I did a big search on the Internet, but drew a blank.

Before he disappeared, he took the album that we recorded and put out a bootleg vinyl on it, interspersed with songs that he had recorded on his own that were very bizarre. And he didn't give us any credit on the album. That album, then, became another bootleg CD that came out of Germany, with our songs on it, again uncared for. It became very popular among certain Underground fans of 1960s rock music. It also led to a lot of misconceptions about who the Penny Arkade were and what our story was.

That led to the publisher of *Ugly Things* magazine finding me through the Internet, and he contacted me and interviewed me; and finally thought that the music was good enough to actually come out since it had never been released. He got in touch with Sundazed Music, and Sundazed got in touch with me. Lo and behold, all the music we recorded will be coming out on a CD from Sundazed within the next few months.

**CM:** What do you do with Craig Smith's share?

**DQ:** We're keeping money aside in case he surfaces. We don't know if he's alive or dead.

All the other members are accounted for, and we are in close contact again, which we hadn't been in 35 years. None of us were aware of the fact that these bootlegs of our music were out. It was a surprise to all of us; we've only been aware of it for the last two years, and it's been out since 1973.

This led to the problem, too, of the masters. Mike Nesmith didn't have any of the masters, and didn't have a clue where they were. Luckily, when we recorded the album back in '68, I said to myself, I might want another acetate dub of this long after mine is scratchy and worn out, what if I can't reach anyone? So I had the foresight while

I had the master in my hand, of having a dupe made. So we have now, as far as the album goes, the closest we can possibly get to the original mix. We didn't have masters on any of the bonus tracks; we just had acetates. Chris Ducey had better acetate dubs than I did.

We had recorded a number of tracks before we did what we perceived as the official album. No one had copies of those. Mike Nesmith didn't have anything either. I was going through my closet looking for some old reel-to-reel tapes, and found one of them that said on the box, "album" and "Old PA stuff 1967." I played the tape, and it was just the album that we already had. But I found something was recorded backwards, so I flipped it over and got nothing. That means they didn't use all four tracks. When I sent out all the material to Sundazed, I said that I think there are some missing songs here, but I don't have the equipment to make out just what these recordings are. If you can somehow retrieve these tracks, we might have something here. They insisted the tape I sent had nothing on it like I was describing. I insisted that "I know it's there, I heard it!" Finally, I got an email from Sundazed saying "We finally found the missing track, and we have a computer program that is able to reverse it. It's nine songs, that are not on the album!" Everything we recorded from start to finish, will be on Penny Arkade's CD.

**CM:** Have you had any contact with Mike Nesmith regarding this project?

**DQ:** I've been in email contact with him quite a bit, because he technically owned the music and owned the name Penny Arkade. Mike very graciously gave us the name, so we are the Penny Arkade, and he has a small percentage of it. He'll be listed as Producer, but now Chris, Bobby, and I are the owners of the name and the music.

It's great to think that after all these years, Penny Arkade is finally getting its time in the sun, thanks to Sundazed Records. ■



# Before Burt Reynolds Came Along, the '70s Road Movie Looked Like This

by Mike Malloy



STANLEY



Any fool can tell you that 1969's *Easy Rider* revolutionized American popular cinema. Hopper and Fonda's new brand of biker films brought counterculture to the mainstream and was a vital step in the film industry's move from star-driven, studio-produced 1960s lightweight fare to the smaller, more personal films of the early '70s.

Often overlooked, though, is *Easy Rider*'s more direct influence. The film sparked a whole subgenre of Road Movies, early '70s films that used the open American highway and fast speeds as commentary on the human journey, on freedom.

Indeed, freedom is a big thematic concern in these films. The two bikers of *Easy Rider* believe they've found freedom from Middle-Class squaredom and the 9-to-5 lifestyle when they hit the highway after a profitable cocaine deal. In 1971's *Vanishing Point*, a former race car driver looks for freedom at high speeds on the open roads of the West. The characters of 1974's *Road Movie* try to find freedom by working as independent trackers and by driving a self-owned rig. And in 1972's *You and Me*, a Hell's Angel and a juvenile runaway pair up in search of a more literal freedom; the biker is on the lam from the law, and the kid wants to escape his homelife with an irresponsible welfare mother.

Of such films, only 1971's *Two-Lane Blacktop* doesn't seem to be overly concerned with a pursuit for freedom. Perhaps *Two-Lane*'s drifter characters have already unconstrained themselves from homes and jobs, and now they're doomed to live their "free" lifestyles.

But in any case, none of these Road Movies is entirely fixated on the white line. They all seem to understand that the bizarre characters inhabiting the roadsides are every bit as important as what happens on the road itself.

So, on the occasion of *Vanishing Point* being recently released to DVD, here is a look at five of the greatest American road films of the 1970s. And naturally, we'll grandfather 1969's *Easy Rider* into this examination. (After all, for purposes of cinema, "the Seventies" really span the years 1967-1976.)

There are, of course, other American Road Movies from this era, most notable among them *The Rain People* (1969), *Duel* (1971), *Corky* (1972), *Badlands* (1973), and *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974). But these films all are focused on other dramatic conflicts, and they spend less time examining the simple condition of "being on the road."

## The Films

**Easy Rider:** With Dennis Hopper as director and Peter Fonda as producer, *Easy Rider* began development at American International Pictures, was produced for \$500 grand by Raybert Productions, and ended up being distributed in 1969 by Columbia Pictures. It's still a matter of some debate who wrote what and how much, but the credited writers are Fonda, Hopper, and Terry Southern. The film is widely available on video and DVD.

**Vanishing Point:** Made at Twentieth Century Fox for a reported \$1.3 million, *Vanishing Point* was directed by Richard C. Sarafian and released in 1971. It seems to have been later re-released as part of a double bill with *The French Connection* (it may also have been paired with *Dirty Mary, Crazy Larry* for a double feature).

**Two-Lane Blacktop:** This film began development at Cinema Center Productions, based on a screenplay by Will Corry. When Monte Hellman became attached as director, he threw out Corry's script and hired Rudy Wurlitzer (jukebox heir and eventual screenwriter of *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*). Corry would receive story and co-writing credit in the finished film.

Then Cinema Center ceased to care to make the film and put it in turnaround. *Two-Lane* went to Universal, where it was made as part of Ned Tanen's "Youth Division" (which also produced Fonda's *The Hired Hand* and Hopper's *The Last Movie* and was very similar to the arrangement at Columbia with BBS [formerly Raybert] that came as a direct result of *Easy Rider*'s success). Hellman had to bring the picture in under \$1 million and under two hours, but he had final cut and virtually no studio interference.

*Two-Lane* enjoyed a nice tie-in with *Esquire* magazine, but otherwise made very little noise at the time of its 1971 release. It has since gained a strong cult reputation and was belatedly released on video and DVD in 1999 by Anchor Bay Entertainment.

**You and Me:** Principal photography

occurred in 1972 on a \$63,500 budget, and director-star David Carradine says he thinks the original version was finished with post production in 1975. According to Carradine, there were two later shoots around 1976, in order to create a new character, a trailing FBI agent. But the footage of this later character never made it into a release print.

Although distributed sporadically in Europe and other parts of the world, *You & Me* has never been commercially exhibited in the United States, nor has it been available on tape in the U.S. But the early version of the film was available as a European PAL videotape on the VCL label. Retitled *California 436* for some foreign markets.

**Road Movie:** The most plausibly and obviously tilted of all the Road Movies, 1974's *Road Movie* was directed by Joseph Sargent, who apparently worked as a long-haul trucker while a teenager. Initially put out by Laser Film Corporation. Now available on DVD and video from Image Entertainment (www.image-entertainment.com)

## The Trips

**Easy Rider:** Los Angeles to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. The trip is funded by a major cocaine score. After Mardi Gras, there is talk of riding down to Florida, but that leg of the trip is cut short by a shotgun. **Vanishing Point:** An auto delivery run from Denver to San Francisco. The driver, for no particular reason, tries to make the trip in 15 hours.

**Two-Lane Blacktop:** The film opens in California. Later, while in Texas, two drivers meet and agree to race to Washington D.C. They travel through Oklahoma and Tennessee, but never make it all the way to D.C.

**You and Me:** From California to Oregon to Washington. As the closing credits roll, we see our travelers on a ferry headed to an island off Vancouver, they're going to escape into Canada without crossing the border.

**Road Movie:** A trucking route through the Rust Belt, with a destination of Chicago. When the load is delivered in Chicago, the truckers pick up another load and head off to an unspecified city. They never make it.

## The Travelers

**Easy Rider:** Wyatt aka Captain America (Peter Fonda) and Billy (Dennis Hopper). **Vanishing Point:** Kowalski (Barry Newman), an auto delivery driver.

**Two-Lane Blacktop:** The Driver (James Taylor), The Mechanic (Brian Wilson), "GTO" (Warren Oates), and The Girl (Laurene Bird).

**You and Me:** California Hell's Angel Zeto (David Carradine) and young runaway Jimmy (Chipper Chadbourn).

**Road Movie:** Independent truck drivers Hank (Barry Bostwick) and Gil (Robert Drivas). They are joined by a lot-lizard prostitute, Janice (Regina Baff), whom the truckers pick up outside a diner.

## The Vehicles

**Easy Rider:** Two Harley 74 choppers, with tear-drop gas tanks and rigid frames. The Captain America bike has extended forks and "ape hanger" handlebars.

**Vanishing Point:** Supercharged 1970 Dodge Challenger, Colorado License Plate OA-5599.

**Two-Lane Blacktop:** The Driver and the Mechanic drive a '55 Chevy modified with a 454 engine, two four-barrel carburetors, four-speed transmission, and a solid-axle



OPPOSITE PAGE (top) Warren Oates in *Two-Lane Blacktop* (middle) Hopper, Fonda, and Nicholson in *Easy Rider* (bottom) road scenes from *Road Movie*

THIS PAGE Dennis Wilson, Laune Bird, and James Taylor in *Two-Lane Blacktop*

front end. GTO drives, well, a GTO. A '70 with a 455 engine, to be specific. (*Two-Lane*'s Chevy later turned up in 1973's *American Graffiti*.)

**You and Me:** Zeto and Jimmy begin their trip on a Harley '74 chopper, but when that bike is maliciously destroyed by a truck driver, Zeto buys a motor-trike.

**Road Movie:** Peterbilt tractor with a sleeper cab, pulling a Trailmobile "reefer" (refrigerated trailer).

## Importance of Music

**Easy Rider:** Apparently, *Easy Rider* was supposed to be scored by folkstars Crosby, Stills & Nash. But during editing, a temporary track of popular rock and folk tunes was used. When it came time for CS&N to view a cut of *Easy Rider* for the purposes of scoring, they felt they couldn't beat the temporary score.

Consequently, *Easy Rider* has one of the most memorable, tastemaking film soundtracks, and Steppenwolf's "Born to Be Wild" has forever been branded a biker anthem after its use during the opening credits. Other hit songs from its soundtrack include "The Weight" by The Band, "The Pusher" by Steppenwolf, and "Don't Bogart Me" by Fraternity of Man.

Best of all, the lyrical content of a song often matches the events of the scene in which it's used. The Hopper and Nicholson characters flap their arms during "If You Want to Be a Bird." The bikers ride through mountains and forests as The Byrds sing about mountains and forests. Money from a drug deal is hidden away during "The Pusher" (in fact, the money is push-fed into a tube during that scene).

**Vanishing Point:** *Vanishing Point* takes a cue from *Easy Rider* in making its rock'n'roll soundtrack figure prominently in the film. But it goes a step further and makes the soundtrack part of the plot; Kowalski's journey is guided by a soul music disc jockey named, appropriately, "Super Soul" (Cleavon Little).

Don't let the absence of hit songs fool you ("Mississippi Queen" by Mountain was the only chart-making cut); the music of *Vanishing Point* makes for one of the great all-time rock and roll soundtracks. Contributions come from popular musicians Kim Carnes (here as part of "Kim & Dave") and Delaney & Bonnie (who appear in the film's desert revival scene), among others. The album was originally released on Amos Records, and now fans regularly trade bootlegged copies.

If ever you see flashing blue lights in your rear-view mirror while the *Vanishing Point* soundtrack is playing on your car stereo, it's going to be damn tough to pull over.

**Two-Lane Blacktop:** There is not so much a music soundtrack to this film (although the music may have indeed occupied its own sound track during post production) as there is "practical" music; a character will turn on the stereo and Kris Kristofferson will be playing, the Chevy will pass by a hamburger stand and The Doors will be playing.

Ironically, although music is not used prominently in *Two-Lane Blacktop* (relative to the other films of this type), the video release of the film was held up for many years by music rights non-clearance.

It's also interesting to note that almost every song – if not every song – in this film features lyrics with references to cars, driving, or the road ("Hit the Road Jack," "Moonlight Drive," "Maybelline," "No Money Down").

**You and Me:** David Carradine, besides directing and starring, also performed most of the music, some of which he composed. Carradine's title song, which sounds to be sung by Carradine and then-girlfriend Barbara Hershey, is sublime.

**Road Movie:** Uses its mostly instrumental blues/soul/rock/country music more as a score than as a rock-and-roll soundtrack.

The music is good and evokes the early-70s in a non-dated way, but the early scenes of the film comprise so many music-fueled driving sequences that some viewers may begin to feel these scenes were included merely to pad out the film's running length.

During the opening credits, a chorus of back-up singers belt a melody line that, later in the film, recurs as a melancholy nylon-string guitar figure.

## On the Side of the Road

**Easy Rider:** The bikers encounter a hippie (Luke Askew), his commune full of starving peaceniks, a rancher living the simple life with his family, a small-town ACLU lawyer (Jack Nicholson) and various, assorted rednecks.

**Vanishing Point:** Kowalski encounters a pair of homosexual highway robbers, a religious cult leader (Severn Darden), a snake handler (Dean Jagger), a biker, and a nude biker. In the British version of the film, Kowalski also meets a hitchhiker (Charlotte Rampling) who symbolically serves as a Death figure.

**Two-Lane Blacktop:** During the film, the GTO character is ever picking up hitchhikers and regaling them with tall tales about his life. He gives a lift to a homosexual hitchhiker (Harry Dean Stanton), a hippie hitchhiker, servicemen hitchhikers, two hitchhikers in mourning, etcetera etcetera etcetera.

**You and Me:** Zeto and Jimmy encounter a malicious truck driver (Gary Busey), a diner waitress (Barbara Hershey), a bike shop owner who's inflexible in his pricing, and a

young, widowed farm owner.

**Road Movie:** When the truckers lose a load of meat to a refrigeration problem, they meet some of Janice's shady friends and pick up a load of stolen electronics.

Throughout their trip, the truckers also encounter many people connected to the shipping industry – all of whom tell them they won't survive long as "gypsy" truckers.

## Is This a Hippie Film?

**Easy Rider:** Only kinda. Fonda's character is peace-loving and nature-loving and all the rest. But Hopper's biker seems not to have been imbued with the same hippie ideals; he threatens violence and is wholly self-interested.

And the film almost makes a point of presenting hippie trappings in a negative light. Commune life is shown as being pretty miserable. The drug score doesn't involve harmless grass, but rather the "harder" cocaine.

Further, *Easy Rider* played before audiences after the hippie movement had crested.

Ultimately, the film seems more interested in examining anti-hippie attitudes (i.e., the persecution of "long hairs") than with examining actual hippie attitudes.

**Vanishing Point:** Nope. Kowalski is involved with hippie culture only insofar as he is involved with drug culture. There are a couple of hippie bikers in this film ("Angel" and "Nude Rider"), but the only substantial connection Kowalski has with them is Beozedrine. (And ruining the film's peaceakin cred is the production design at the hippies' shack, where a spray-painted Peace sign is mis-drawn as a Mercedes logo!)

However, a brief visual reference to *Easy Rider*'s Captain America character appears in *Vanishing Point*, in the form of a bike with an American-flag gas tank and helmet.

**Two-Lane Blacktop:** Nope. This film is often misguidedly tagged with the label "The last film of the Sixties" (or some variation thereof). And the implication is that *Two-Lane Blacktop* is somehow a hippie counterculture film. And that's just a load of bunk, because the characters don't embody hippie notions. (GTO tells some roadside Oklahomans that The Driver and The Mechanic are by no means hippies), and while the characters are vaguely disaffected, they aren't specifically counterculture.

But more importantly, *Two-Lane Blacktop* is wonderfully typical of the small, understated, character-driven pieces of the early '70s – what has generally become known as "Seventies Cinema."

Hippie culture is represented only by the bit part of a peaceakin hitchhiker.

**You and Me:** Nope. Although it's especially sensitive and thoughtful for a film with an outlaw biker as its main character, *You and Me* has neither hippie characters nor



ROAD MOVIE'S ROAD TO RUIN (top) Prostitute Regina Ball works hooker magic on weigh-station attendant Marvin Kove while trucker Robert Drivas looks away; (above) Trucker Barry Bostwick tries to save his runaway rig

hippie sentiments.

**Road Movie:** Nope. Although this examination of truckers is a look at a fringe of society, it has nothing to do with the hippie fringe. *Road Movie* has a tough, blue-collar mindset and has no time for that hippie nonsense.

ment figure — a motorcycle cop — is gunned down on the road by a counterculture type, a hippie head shop supplier.

**Vanishing Point:** You bet. Kowalski deliberately drives his Dodge into a bulldozer roadblock, killing himself in the bargain. The viewer can feel the least bit okay about this conclusion only because Kowalski wears a faint smirk on his face as he races toward his certain death.

It is assumed that the conclusion that occurs at the end of the film is the "true" conclusion of the car chase; the beginning of the film contains an alternate ending in which Kowalski does not fatally ram the barricade. **Two-Lane Blacktop:** Yep. At the end of the film, the characters are still stuck in their self-

perpetuating cycle of depressing pointlessness. *GTO* is still picking up hitchhikers, trying to delude his passengers (and perhaps himself) that there is more to his life than what they see. *The Driver*, along with *The Mechanic*, is going from drag race to drag race, having wasted his opportunity to have something meaningful with *The Girl*.

**You and Me:** Surprisingly, no. Zeto and Jimmy escape their law-enforcement pursuers and presumably start a new life together in Canada. Carradine said he shot the script as written — except the ending, which had Zeto gunned down by *The Man*. **Road Movie:** Yep, the ending is high tragedy. The three main characters start the film all in a tough spot, and the truckers' relationship

## Downbeat Ending?

**Easy Rider:** Sure. Billy and Wyatt are fatally blasted off their choppers by a shotgun-toting redneck.

This ending, of bike-riding counterculture figures being gunned down on the road by an establishment type, was totally inverted for the ending of 1973's *Electra Glide in Blue*. In that film, a bike-riding establish-

with their lot lizard, Janice, begins on a rough note. But they eventually begin working as a team, and it seems that they might even start breaking even. Janice implies that she will give up hooking in order to ride with the truckers and start something of a family unit with them. "Don't push me out," is all she asks. But after Janice helps the truckers by sexually servicing two weigh-station cops, the truckers silently resent her. When they pull onto a steep shoulder to force her out of the rig, Janice releases the parking break and puts the truck in gear. The rig turns over and crashes, and the nicer of the two drivers is killed in the wreck.

## How Existential?

**Easy Rider:** Kinda, as embodied in the Peter Fonda character. All along, Wyatt (Fonda) seems to know what he expresses near the end of the film in his famous "We blew it" line, there is no redemption at the end of this trip. And yet he rides ahead nonetheless, because that's what he feels he should do. **Vanishing Point:** Very Such a question as "What are the meaning of your actions?" would fall on deaf ears if posed to Kowalski. He is trying to drive from Denver to 'Frisco in 15 hours. He has no good reason. His illegal speed cruise is just something for a human being to do in this world (perhaps similar to the pointless killing of an Arab in Camus' *The Stranger*).

**Two-Lane Blacktop:** Supremely. The question of "Why?" is not applicable here. The Driver and The Mechanic drive and drag because that's what they do. GTO drives and lies because that's what he does. There is no point. There is no why. There just is.

**You and Me:** Not at all. *You and Me* has a hopeful ending and a sentimental biker-kid relationship that suggests life can be meaningful.

**Road Movie:** Not really. No matter how indifferent (and often calculatedly crud) the world of *Road Movie* seems to the viewer, the truckers seem to believe that their toils will pay off.

## The Bottom Line

**Easy Rider:** Ultimately, *Easy Rider* is more important in its cinematic influence than it is a great film. There are on-the-nose stabs at profundity, as when the bikers change a flat tire next to a rancher shoeing his horse, and when Wyatt frees himself from the burden of time by casting his wristwatch to the ground. Other pretentious moments have Wyatt sensitively touching a dead animal in a gutter and foreshadowing solemnly, "I think I'm going to crash."

Further, the film's principal hippie characters — those played by Fonda and

Askew — are too laconic and laid back to be very accessible. And Hopper's character is sometimes manic, always annoying. It's only when the magnetic Jack Nicholson joins the ride midway through the film that *Easy Rider* becomes highly watchable.

The scene changes are handled somewhat experimentally, as they cut back and forth between the tail end of one scene and the very beginning of the following scene. It is tremendously exciting to look at. **Vanishing Point:** *Vanishing Point* is cool as hell. The rock'n'soul soundtrack, the exciting direction, the muscular Dodge, the rubber-burning sound design all combine to make a *Road Movie* that can be enjoyed either as an art film or as an action picture.

Second only to *Easy Rider* as an undeniably piece of pop culture, *Vanishing Point* has been referenced in songs and/or music videos by Guns N' Roses, Audioslave, and Primal Scream. And Fox capitalized on its cult popularity by making a blasphemous telefilm remake (starring Viggo Mortensen as "Jimmy" Kowalski), which aired in 1997. **Two-Lane Blacktop:** Most plot synopses for *Two-Lane Blacktop* describe the film as being about a cross-country auto race, with each driver competing for the pink slips to both cars. But if the viewer approaches *Two-Lane* expecting anything so tightly plotted as a car race with an actual finish line and an actual winner, he or she is bound to be frustrated. Because while the race — supposedly the central conflict of the film — has a definite beginning, it has neither a middle nor an end.

But plot is of little importance, relative to the fascinating characters and high realism. This sense of realism was created by shooting in sequence, shooting on locations across the country, and withholding later script pages from the actors (so as to prevent any liability of foreknowledge). The realism was also aided by location casting of non-actors — a casting scheme used to great effect in *Easy Rider*.

Neither James Taylor nor Dennis Wilson (both musicians by primary trade) are particularly naturalistic as actors, but each characterizes perfectly; we get a clear sense of who their characters are. Warren Oates gives an unforgettable performance as the complex, semi-delusional loser GTO. Respected critic Leonard Maltin says Oates should have won the Oscar (the actor wasn't even nominated) and that the performance is as good as you'll ever see. Maltin isn't kidding.

**You and Me:** David Carradine's directorial debut, *You and Me* doesn't feel like a finished work. Carradine himself seems to be providing the voices of a lot of other characters in ADR wild lines. And some scenes seem to have required creative editing to hide the lack of coverage shot during this low-budget production.

But there are many flashes of genius here, and those scenes that do play as complete are often magnificent. The argument between Zeta and a bike shop owner over the price of a carb kit is about as good and as realistic as filmed drama can get. Indeed, Carradine is wonderful in his performance, and the relationship between the biker and kid is genuinely touching.

**Road Movie:** A great slab of gritty '70s drama, replete with tough, cruel characters struggling in an even tougher, crueler world.

Every bit as good as the other films in this subgenre, *Road Movie* lacks the cult reputation of the others — possibly because it doesn't cater to a built-in audience of hip bikers or gearheads as the others do. And your writer has no idea whether this is held as a classic amongst truck drivers.

The many driving sequences in the early part of this film may ruin the pacing for less patient viewers, but the scenery along the way more than justifies their inclusion. The cinematography and direction (2nd unit?) wonderfully capture the eyesores of junked-up urban areas, rusted-out industrial sites, and only slightly less ugly rural stretches.

Look for Martin Kove (*Last House on the Left*, *The Karate Kid*) to appear in the weigh station scene and Joseph Pantoliano (*The Handler, Memento*) to appear as a bit-part mugger.

\* \* \*

By the latter half of the 1970s, things had changed. The predominant incarnations of the *Road Movie* had become the Good Ol' Boy/CB Radio film (1977's *Smoky & the Bandit*, 1978's *Convoy*) and the Organized Cross-Country Road Race movie (*The Gumball Rally* and *Cannonball* [both 1976]).

But the spirit of the Early '70s *Road Movie* endures. The recent film to best show the influence of this cinematic subset is 1992's *Roadside Prophets*. Although weakly acted and scripted, *Prophets* is concerned only with headin' out on the highway and — as its title might indicate — meeting strange counterculture weirdos on the side of the road (Timothy Leary and Arlo Guthrie, for two). And the lead casting of musicians Adam Horovitz and John Doe recalls James Taylor and Dennis Wilson in *Two-Lane Blacktop*.

Sadly, it's not likely the film industry will ever again experience the conditions necessary to create such a spate of great *Road Movies* as were made in the early '70s. Thankfully, we have the chance to own *Easy Rider*, *Vanishing Point*, *Two-Lane Blacktop*, and *Road Movie* on digital versatile disc. Four out of five ain't bad, but here's hoping we'll see a proper release of *You and Me*. ■

# HAROLD'S HERALD

by Michael Copner



Harold Greenland with Japanese film producer

Let me tell you about three diverse and colorful characters. Each one is slightly connected to the other in some way, and these connections culminate in the predictions of the past you'll see when you reach our centerfold.

The first man in this group was a businessman named Harold Greenland. He was a high-rolling guy in his day, with operations on the fringes of the entertainment world. Picture Jack Ruby on a national scale and you've got the idea. Mr. Greenland had burlesque houses, adult movie theaters and cocktail bars in key American cities. He certainly had interests in Seattle, Buffalo, Los Angeles and San Francisco, and possibly Miami Beach and Toledo as well. In Seattle he had four adult theaters, and that's where I met him in the early 1970s when I was a projectionist at his Embassy theater.

Harold got real lucky and booked *Deep Throat* into his Garden Art Theater where the film played for years.

Mr. G also had an entourage around him that was a lot of fun. Don Kinney and his wife toured the circuit and served as managers for him. Don had been an attorney at one time, but retired to work the theaters. He had enthusiasm for classic films and theater pipe organ music. He also had a famous uncle who developed Venice Beach in Los Angeles. Abbott Kinney Blvd. is the beachfront street named for the uncle.

Also on the scene was a slender and attractive lady named Dorothy Lee who traveled the circuit, insuring that most of the box office profits from the various cities wound up in Greenland's bank vaults. It was rumored that she'd been Mr. G's mistress at one time, but no one knew for sure.

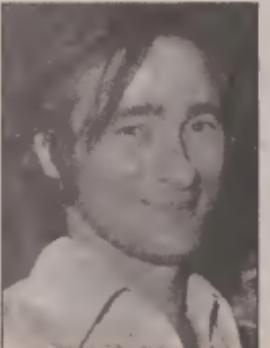
There were also two burly gentlemen who

served as bodyguards and occasional strong-arm men for Harold. But we won't get into that.

Somewhere along the line, Mr. Greenland had picked up ownership of a respectable daily newspaper in Los Angeles. *The Citizen News* had a large office in Hollywood and was a reasonable alternative to the *LA Times*.

Fascinating to us is that, on the day Harold's paper began running Criswell's syndicated columns of predictions, they not only saw fit to run it on the front page - they ran it above the title of the paper! That's prestige for someone who was never taken seriously (except by Peter Coe, Mae West, Johnny Carson, Ed Wood, Vampira and a score of others) in his time. So Criswell becomes the second character in our saga.

The third man of distinction is Titus Moody, who was himself colorful citizen-news for many years. Actor, photographer, producer, director -



Titus Moody

Titus did it all! And rubbed shoulders with many greats before working his way down.

Titus died in 2001. Due to circumstances, a box of his clippings had been left in my care. Recently while leafing through the box of photos, negatives, magazines, circulars and so forth, I saw this complete issue of the *Citizen News*. Why was it in the keeping of Titus? I turned the pages gingerly, for the 34-year-old newsprint is quickly flaking to dust.

I came to the entertainment page and found the probable answer. There is a movie review for Ray Steckler's *Incredibly Strange Creatures*. Titus played a part in that film, and it would seem he kept reviews of everything he ever worked on, in order to demonstrate to fans and potential employers how versatile and productive he was in show biz. Now, five years after his passing, our friend shows a picture or two to you, for your cherished approval.

And what of Mr. Greenland, the hub around which this wheel of activity had been revolving?

In the early 1980s, the runs began slipping through the fingers of the theater magnate. Greenland ran into bad luck, then vanished as his empire was fragmented and fell into a variety of hands.

Sometime in 1985, I believe, Baghdad By The Bay beckoned, and I spent a few days in San Francisco, wandering the foggy night streets that quite contrast with the bland blue-sky freeways of Los Angeles. Imagine my surprise coming down Market Street, finding one of the last actual adult theaters remaining in downtown San Francisco. And there in the box office sat The Godfather himself: Mr. Greenland. Older now, but still dapper in a silk suit with diamond rings on his pinky fingers. The ever-present cigar was clutched in one hand.

Naturally I assumed that the man had pulled himself up by his own bootstraps again, and was running a chain of his own theaters. I went over by the neon lighted cage and introduced myself.

"Mr. Greenland, I used to work for you in Seattle. It's good to see you're in the theater game again!"

But no. This was not the case. Mr. G had lost everything, and a conederate friend from the past had given Greenland a charity job as a ticket seller in one of his movie houses.

No use belaboring the obvious here, musing about how far from grace the mightiest among us can fall when the trickster taps us on the shoulder, declaring our time has irreversibly arrived. Well past retirement age, but needing the work, Mr. Greenland was generously granted an office to go to each day, tickets to rip each night. Something to do.

Shortly after my last meeting with him by the Golden Gate, Harold died. In the beyond, he dwells with every interconnected player in this tiny time, each of them crumbling to dust as we speak. Leaving behind a back issue of a yellowed journal recalled by a few as the *Citizen News*, likewise crumbling.

For a fast chance glance at the cover, you may conveniently turn the page ■

# Criswell Predicts... Lt. Calley's Freedom With Flying Colors

I PREDICT . . . That Lt. Calley will exit the present foray with flying colors, that of the American flag! Some of his legal enemies who scream "treason and murder" will soon face a similar charge when some of the campus and street ringlegs are further investigated!

I REGRET TO PREDICT that the sands of time will run out for a lauded Midwest Senator who was elected on one promise but dissolved his voten by his ardent Communist support of Russia, Cuba and Chile! We cannot carry water on both sides nor chase two rabbits at the same time! This, after all, many of the others face a voter's recall by a People's Commission of the State of California. For the KKK apprehension will owe their victory at the polls to the KKK and not to their protest peace marches and red liberal flag waving! Remember this prediction when the votes are tallied this coming November! . . . I predict that Hale Smith, the Hollywood Hobo, will soon to the top other heap with his forthcoming film to be premiered in September "Last Of The Am-*ican Hobos*." This remarkable prediction by Texas

application, and live off the "square" taxpayers! The police are interested in these nests of crime as they are a cancerous growth on any community! These communie members are

## Criswell Predicts

A NEW EXCLUSIVE WEEKLY FEATURE  
OF THE CITIZEN NEWS  
Criswell has predicted elections, earthquakes, murders and suicides with uncanny accuracy.

and Area Brain to the White House in 1958-59? How England almost joined Germany in an invasion of France? How Russia and Germany planned to invade England? And why France fell so quickly when a national strike was called by the pro-Communist CGT? How the United States and Britain was favored over Germany and Japan? These incidents of 30 years ago will remind us that no one really wins a war, we JUST set the stage for another one! Our dearest friends were once our worst enemies and now our worst enemies are our dearest friends!

### INTERNATIONAL

I predict that on the international front, do not be too shocked when the United States and Britain make a strong move into Africa! Nostradamus predicted that by 1970 the Black Continent of Africa will become the Red Continent of Africa! The recent purge in Sudan and in Ethiopia can only point to Russian renewed interest! Remember the month of September!

More of Criswell's Predictions Next Week.

### KRISTOVICH SUSPENDED

## Dorn's Task Force Ousts Administrator For 'Mismanagement'

By EDWARD DE VERE

Los Angeles County public administrator Baldino Kristovich Wednesday was suspended by the Board of Supervisors for 30 days, in a 4-0 vote, during the time of a Grand Jury investigation of his office. Kristovich is under investigation for mismanagement of personal property under the control of his office.

The investigation by the Board of Supervisors began earlier this week.

However, Dist. Atty. Joseph P. Busch Jr. has informed the office for the past four months.

Chairman of the Board of Supervisors Warren Dorn said that James Mine, and a "task force" was now running the Office of Public Administration.

Mine is an executive officer for the Board of Supervisors.

The Citizen News learned that the investigation grew out of the handling of the multi-million dollar estate of the late Joe Crail, former chairman of the board of Coast and Southern Federal Savings and Loan and Coast Management Co.

The late financier disposed three of his four children in a handwritten



WARREN DORN

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Per Copy

# Citizen News

"It Tells the Truth"

# WATSON COPS OUT! ADMITS 'ACID TRIP' TATE SLAYINGS!

## Confirms Manson Role In Mass Murders



### Ziffren For Muskie

Paul Ziffren, California's former Democratic national committeeman, today announced he was endorsing the presidential candidacy of U.S. Senator Edmund Muskie.

Ziffren said the Maine Democrat's campaign is far more advanced than any other presidential campaign in his experience.

"Senator Muskie already has campaign organizations in the primary state and both young people and long-time Democratic Party

Charles (Tex) Watson admitted on the witness stand to taking part in the mass murder at the home of actress Sharon Tate, but insisted it was not he who stabbed the pregnant actress.

The 23-year-old follower of Charles Manson told a Superior Court jury he had taken a variety of drugs during the day before the bloody killings in August of 1968.

He said the drugs were LSD, "speed" and "belladonna."

"I couldn't make it out," he

He said he went into a shack

and when there all drugs had been used.

In the late '50s and early '60s, television was a vast wonderland, filled with imagination, unreality, and pure unadulterated simple fun! Today such entertainment doesn't exist! Our monsters are complex, relentless, and digital. They attack us in 5.1 sound from a flat plasma TV and there's enough blood, puss, and slime to make one grateful this home theater doesn't include "smell-o-vision."

But back in the day when there were three networks which the highbrow Mecca of television was represented by, there were also wonderful local stations that provided blue collar fare. Kiddie shows with un-funny clowns, mythical train engineers, sheriffs who didn't carry guns; and all of them drank their milk, ate their veggies, and said their prayers every night (or so we were led to believe). Then there was the programming on these stations that was questionable for young viewers (unlike today where no holds are barred).

Man were populated by James Whale's gallery psycho comics, but *Bride* is a whole world of twisted eccentricities, led by Dr. Pretorius.

The combination of horror and comedy has always been a dicey proposition for filmmakers. Some moviegoers prefer not to mix these two elements, which has produced more than a few failures at the box office. Historians usually categorize the Abbott And Costello Meet the monsters films as horror/comedy classics. But Universal's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) could be considered the first horror/comedy classic.

The Laemmles had been pestering James Whale with their newest project, "The Return of Frankenstein." Whale felt that he had exhausted all the possibilities of Mary Shelley's creature in the first film. Both he and Karloff considered the original the best. Whale confided to his friend and collaborator R.C. Sheriff that he wished to in no way be a part of a dreadful *Frankenstein* sequel.

Portable with Whale's sadism. Author H.G. Wells objected to R.C. Sheriff's and Whale's take on his "Invisible One," specifically the use of a drug that causes invisibility and madness. Whale's response to Wells was, anyone who would crave invisibility would have to be a maniac.

Boris Karloff, like Whale, had reservations about reprising his role as the monster. Karloff rarely complained about the ordeals of, as he called it, the makeup shop; but in a 1958 radio interview with Clive Edwards (which took place in Carmel, California), he recalled the rigors of making the first film. "The makeup took about four hours to put on. It was a terrible job. I worked every day in the film, the film took eight weeks to make, and I remember one awful occasion when I got into the makeup shop at half past three in the morning, to be ready to go out on location, and we went out and we worked in the hot sun at the edge of the lake, the scene with the little girl. We came back to the studio in the evening to have some supper, and we went out one the back lot, and I worked all night until five in the morning. I had the makeup on for twenty-five hours! That was a long pull. The carbon lights were dreadful. They hurt your eyes. The boots weighed about sixteen pounds apiece. All told, the outfit weighed between forty and forty-five pounds."

It has been reported that Boris Karloff had to carry Colin Clive up the hill to the windmill in the first *Frankenstein*, without the aid of stuntmen, dummies, or doubles, to the point of straining Boris' already fragile back. According to Elsa Lanchester, Whale referred to Karloff as "that truck driver," and at times would become jealous of all the attention Karloff received on the set of the sequel. There are many publicity photographs of James Whale hammering it up with Karloff's dummy stand-in, and Karloff himself, to show that James Whale was not about to be ignored. Whale believed that he was the "Puppet Master" when it came to Karloff's monster. He had originally sketched and then screen tested the future star Karloff and Whale disagreed often.

It has been widely reported that Karloff had the scene with little Maria at the lake cut in the first film. This seems unlikely, and many accounts about the censorship of the original *Frankenstein* have been reported over the decades. One was the Laemmles had ordered the cuts, most of all Junior. After a preview in the fall of 1931 in Santa Barbara, Junior was terrified that the audience would be repelled by the picture.

In 1993, author David J. Skal reported that the censorship issue was a matter decided by the individual states where the film was to be shown. The state of Kansas cut the film heavily, while Skal maintains that *Frankenstein* appears to have been shown complete in California (with additional shots of Mina drowning, not included in the 1980s restoration of *Frankenstein*). He also reports that in June of 1937, cuts were required for the film's announced re-release, and that the "Now I know what it's like to be God" sequence was mentioned in a San Francisco review of the show's original release.

"The Return of Frankenstein" would have as

# "It's a Perfect Night for Mystery and Horror!" THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN revisited

By Jan Alan Henderson

The monster movie shows! Where one finally got to see the great stuff we read about in such 'zines as *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, *Fantastic Monsters*, and *Castle of Frankenstein*. Most monster boomer will remember the classic *Bride of Frankenstein* in FM #21 in early 1963.

Shortly after reading that classic issue, the Million Dollar Movie ran *Bride* nine times in one week – five times on the week days and twice a day at the weekend. Million Dollar Movie was a showcase for old movies that ran on KHJ TV in Los Angeles during the late '50s and early '60s. After seeing dynamic photographs and all the reading I had done, to see this sequel to *Frankenstein* was more than amazing – to see these images come to life, and to hear the quirky dialogue, with a music score that opened the heavens. Needless to say, I watched *Bride* as many times that week as my parents would allow.

One thing that struck me at this tender age was how odd the characters were in this show. *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* had their share of weirdos. *The Old Dark House* and *The Invisible*

and that he was using Sheriff's magnificent script of *The Invisible Man* to placate the Laemmles. Whale insisted that Carl Laemmle, Jr., take Sheriff's script home, and after a good dinner to read the script in its entirety. Whale knew this would irritate junior Laemmle, as his habit was to not work after his evening meal.

Whale's production of *The Invisible Man* displays his love for macabre humor, but also introduces the audience to the sadistic side of James Whale. While Una O'Connor's portrayal of Mrs. Hall and E. E. Clive's constable seem to be the prototype of their characters Minnie and the Burgomaster in *Bride*, the "invisible one" portrayed by Claude Rains is a cackling sadist. Most of the comedy in *The Invisible Man* turns to dark tragedy, most often inflicted by the "invisible one." His mental torture of his former colleague, Kemp, contains not one ounce of comedy, while his adventures in the small village of Epping rock of comedy. It is possible that Karloff and Whale would have differed on the "Invisible One's" character. No doubt Karloff would have been uncom-

many problems with moral issues and censors. These facts contradict the story of the *Regina Theatre* in Los Angeles, California.

The problem with "The Return of Frankenstein" was story. Laemmle, Jr., was dissatisfied with an early treatment prepared by Robert Florey, entitled "The New Adventures of Frankenstein - The Monster Lives." It bounced around the Universal story department from December of 1931, and in February of 1932 his treatment was finally rejected. It was announced that Florey was in pre-production on *The Wolfman* and *The Invisible Man*. Florey had no contract with Universal, and was subsequently cut out of all three pictures. Universal staff writer Tom Reed (who co-scripted Robert Florey's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*) wrote an early treatment. Some of Reed's scenes remain in *Brake*, but the majority of the screenplay was written by William Hurlbut, with the Mary Shelley prologue from an unacceptable John L. Baldwin script.

One source reports that there was a treatment by L. G. Blechman that had Henry and Elizabeth traveling with a circus under the alias Heinrich. The monster finds them, and Henry creates a Bride in a circus wagon, with electricity bootlegged from a power pole. Henry completes the female creature, only to have her perish. The monster, after losing his only chance at happiness, is killed by one of the circus lions.

Perhaps the wildest conception of the sequel was John L. Baldwin's. His was the most gruesome and potentially offensive. In his story, the Bride was created from morgue leftovers and female parts rifled from shipwrecks. The most outlandish element of Baldwin's version was the Bride's head and shoulders were taken from an Amazon circus freak with water on the brain.

Whale carefully crafted the script with Hurlbut to suit his sense of the bizarre. Whale told his life partner, David Lewis, that if he had to make this Frankenstein picture, it would be a send-up!

The proposed script met severe opposition from the production codes' Joseph Breen. Whale wrote a solicitous letter to Breen, assuring him that matters such as necrophilia, sacrilegious images, and entrails, would be modified to suit the production code. Whale outsmarted Breen with his use of subtlety. Religious images remain, and most film historians point out the Christian symbolism, but fail to note that Dr. Pretorius seems to be wearing an oversized yarmulke when unveiling his miniature creatures to Henry Frankenstein.

Whale had Colin Clive back to reprise his role as Henry Frankenstein. Karloff was back, deprived of his first name in publicity, as the monster. Valerie Hobson was brought in from the U.K. to take Mae Clarke's place as Elizabeth, but the most ingenious bit of casting is Ernest Thesiger as Doctor Pretorius. Thesiger as Pretorius is an extension of Thesiger's Horace Fenn from *The Old Dark House*. He is bitchy, camp, unpredictable, and has a weakness for gin. For years, modern writers have pigeonholed Pretorius and Thesiger as gay. Whether Whale envisioned the doctor that way is debat-

able. In real life, Thesiger was married to the same woman for 50 years, and had an impressive record in World War I, but as to his homosexuality, it's anyone's guess and no one's business. He brings the sinister tone to the film, as he croaks to Henry (before the creation), that once they "would have been burnt at the stake as wizards" (for their experiment) and he fancies himself a bit of a devil. A delicious character in Whale's cinematic circus.

Una O'Connor's character, Minnie, is as over the top as Thesiger's Pretorius. Her shrieks, utterances, and wimperings, accent the manic comedy through the body of the show. E. E. Clive's interpretation of walrus mustached, innumerable burgomaster is the third comedy element. His muttering of "No no no," and "Merely an escaped lunatic," add to the ambience of the show.

Charles D. Hall's art direction is vividly

rumors of his dreary life after show business on skid row, nothing is known about him.

In 1935, *The Bride of Frankenstein* was nominated for an Academy Award for best sound recording.

In 1982, editor Ted Kent described the creation scene in *The Bride of Frankenstein* to James Whale biographer James Curtis. "The Special Effects and Electrical Departments made up numerous meaningless gadgets, switches, indicators and the like, and Whale chose the most interesting. In a sequence of this sort, where so many cuts are required, the burden of constructing it has to be the editor's. Procedure is slow and one has to feel his way through an abundance of film. The length of the cuts is important. The gadgets and paraphernalia interspersed with the subject must be interestingly used so as to avoid repetition. The effect is made to hold the audience's attention to



atmosphere, with moody skyline scenes, burnt out windmills, and authentic Tyrolean villages.

Cinematographer John Mescall's photography is fluid, and highlights the sets and players to maximum effect. Utilizing low-angle photography, Mescall captures Whale's vision of a demented European village inhabited by twisted misfits, and gods and monsters. Mescall worked well with Whale. He never troubled the director with trivial details, and worked fast. The brass at Universal had cause for concern when it came to Mescall. He was a chronic alcoholic, whose work did not suffer while he was drinking. It was getting to and from work that was the problem.

John Mescall was born January 10, 1887, in Litchfield, Illinois, and despite his drinking, had quite a celebrated career. He began his association with James Whale on *The Invisible Man* as an assistant to special effects man John P. Fulton. He collaborated with director James Whale on five of Whale's productions. Drinking finally got the better of Mescall, and after that

the extent that they forgot that they are watching nothing but film. The director, of course, can and does have a say in its overall length. The sound effects are an important factor, but in my opinion, the most valuable contribution to this sequence was made by Franz Waxman for his imaginative musical score."

Like Max Steiner's magnificent score for *King Kong*, Franz Waxman's music for *The Bride of Frankenstein* was a classic example of music being as important as the visuals for setting the tone of what many regard as classic fantasy films. Whale insisted that Waxman compose a number of unresolved themes, which would lead up to the creation theme for the final visual and musical send-off of the film. This must have impressed American composer Richard Rodgers, because themes in his hit musical *South Pacific* are a little too close to Waxman's score for *Brake*.

The set was a pleasant one, yet serious. Many publicity photos have the English cast taking tea together, with Elsa Lanchester in a

wicker chair due to her bandages. Werewolf of London was shooting at an adjacent stage, and a corridor was constructed so that Valerie Hobson could make her way between stages, as she was appearing in both features. This was done for security reasons, as Universal did not wish photographs of either monster to be circulated in the press before their scheduled releases.

Cortlandt Hull, the great nephew of Henry Hull, star of The Werewolf of London, remembers his great uncle telling him of an interesting incident that happened to his wife while visiting him on the set. "Henry's wife came to visit him on the set, and somehow she was directed to the wrong soundstage. She walked onto the *Bride* set by mistake. A technician told her that no, Henry was not on the set, but was on another set. 'You don't have to go around the buildings, because there's a connecting corridor that has been set up between the two sets. The corridor was dimly lit. As she proceeded down the other end of the corridor, she heard, 'thump, thump, thump.' Halfway through, she saw Boris coming down the corridor in full Frankenstein makeup, smoking a cigar. As they met, he said, 'Good morning, Mrs. Hull.' She went 'Aaa,'

aaah, aiee." One must remember that she and Henry knew Boris, but that day in the corridor in the full Frankenstein get-up, she didn't recognize him. To see that make-up in person, she had never realized how impressive it was."

The success of the laser and tape release of the restored Frankenstein prompted Universal in 1986 to begin a search for the missing footage from *Bride of Frankenstein*. Technical Director of Universal Home Video, Ron Roloff, recalls, "In 1985 MCA did a worldwide search on any prints of *Bride* that might exist in any of the foreign vaults. We were looking for longer prints, longer negatives, odd reels, any of that kind of stuff. The search drew a blank. In 1992, it was rumored that the Library of Congress had unearthed a complete print of *Bride*, an original nitrate that had been copyrighted in 1934. This supposedly complete print was first shown at the Director's Guild. Our feedback at the time was that it didn't contain anything extra, yet a year later at the Alex Theater in Glendale, California, it was advertised as the 92-minute version. Before any of these rumors started, we had the print at the Library of Congress measured, and compared it to what we have on the

lot, and they were the same."

Many modern-day authors and critics have tried to put a psycho-sexual backspin on *The Bride of Frankenstein*. Seventy years later, *Bride*, as its star Boris Karloff described it, is more like a Grimm's Fairy Tale.

Back in the pages of *Famous Monsters*, there was a column called "The Graveyard Examiner." Fans were asked to poll their favorite horror films, and *Bride* was on most every fan's list. In 1999 *Bride* was released on DVD, and five years later it was re-issued as part of Universal's Legacy DVD Box Sets. Each year, fans discover and re-discover *The Bride of Frankenstein*, and in the crazy world we live in, it's nice to know we can always visit a fantasy world of gods and monsters! ■

*Portions of this article were published in American Cinematographer Magazine in January 1988. The article was written by the late George E. Turner and this writer. Mr. Turner's portion of the article does not appear here, as his estate owns the copyright to his work. This article is dedicated to the memory of George and Jean Turner.*



Previous page: Elsa and Boris in the classic pose from *Bride of Frankenstein*. If the monster hadn't demanded a mate, the monster boom of the Sixties would have been a much duller affair! Ever much the classic that *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone With the Wind* are

Above: Karloff face to face with the burgomaster, E. E. Clive.

Right: A rare British ad from 1935.

The monster demands a mate

**Bride of Frankenstein**

**KARLOFF**

**Elsa Lanchester**

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CULT MOVIES



# Lee Van Cleef

## A Biographical, Film and Television Reference

Mike Malloy



204 pages \$24.95 softcover  
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ISBN 0-7864-2272-6 2005 [1998]

"Impressive...engaging and useful...Malloy does a nice job of detailing the last phase of Van Cleef's career" — *Film & History*; "very thorough" — *ARBA*; "Malloy has done his homework...nicely readable, crammed full of information" — *The World of Yesterday*; "the filmography is very thorough" — *Western Clippings*.

Cult film star Lee Van Cleef began his movie career in Hollywood, appearing as evil-eyed villains in such 1950s and '60s Westerns as *High Noon*, *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* and *How the West was Won*. But Van Cleef didn't achieve full-blown fame until he began starring in Spaghetti Westerns overseas. He played opposite Clint Eastwood in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* and *For a Few Dollars More* before becoming a tough-guy star in his own right. By the 1980s, Van Cleef was aging and his weakened health, but he still managed to give thrilling performances in such films as *Escape from New York* and in a weekly martial-arts TV series, *The Master*.

Film-by-film and show-by-show, this work fully details Van Cleef's career. Each movie entry includes cast and credits, studio, running times, year of release, a plot synopsis and a brief overview of Van Cleef's role. The background of the ABC series *The Master* is then given, followed by an episode guide that provides airdate, cast and credits, a synopsis and a comment on the episode. Comprehensive information on Van Cleef's other appearances in television concludes the work.

Film journalist Mike Malloy has contributed movie-related feature articles for such publications as *Cult Movies Magazine*, *Stumped! Magazine*, *Marietta Daily Journal*, *Entertainment Today*, and *Star Trek Communicator*. He resides in Atlanta, Georgia.

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# THE SAGA OF A CORMAN STOCK PLAYER



Jay Sayer survived  
Viking Women and  
Satellite Wars!

BY TOM WRAVEY

**I**t's a movie that now stands out in the early career of maverick producer-director Roger Corman for a variety of reasons. First because of the title, a theater marquee dresser's worst nightmare: *The Saga of the Viking Women and Their Voyage to the Waters of the Great Sea Serpent*. Next for the record number of setbacks, mishaps and injuries that plagued the 1957 production. Then, and perhaps primarily, for the doddiness of the movie itself, an epic medieval tale (on a sandal-string budget) of Viking maidens, sailing the North Atlantic in search of their missing men-folk, washing ashore in a land of barbarians. Mix in the unmistakably twentieth-century "Corman stock company" in Viking and barbarian garb, a pig sporting a set of false teeth, a hand puppet sea serpent (ad absurdum) and the course has been charted to a grade-D cinema shipwreck unique in the logs of Hollywood fantasy adventure.

One last touch of *Viking Women* weirdness: the spectacle of a grown man, 24-year-old Jay Sayer, playing Senja, the barbarian king's whining-brat, weakling son — a sniveling role originally written to be played by an actor in his mid-teens! *Viking Women* was one of five Corman flicks for former New York casting agent Sayer, whose candle flamed in the Corman firmament for 11 months in 1957-58, starting with the showy supporting role of a young psycho in the j.d. actioner *Teenage Doll* and ending as a gay hoodlum in the Depression-era gangster drama *Machine-Gun Kelly*.

Disillusioned with show biz, Sayer later set aside his acting aspirations and began a career as an educator that has taken him around the globe and far away from the strange B-movie universe of Viking women, teenage dolls, sorority girls and warring satellites.

**JAY SAYER:** My career in show business started at a very early age. My parents allowed me to take tap dancing lessons and acting lessons and all of that good stuff, and I started performing at about the age of four, doing all kinds of benefits. I did some theater work on Broadway as a child actor, in plays like *Tomorrow the World* and *Lillian Hellman's Watch on the Rhine* and *Lady in the Dark* with Gertrude Lawrence. Then I went to the High School of Music and Art, as a music major, and pursued the arts in that direction. After I went to a college in Pennsylvania for a year, I went to Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, where I was a theater arts major. Rollins was full of very wealthy kids who had flushed out of or couldn't get into the major Ivy League schools. And so Daddy would give Rollins a huge endowment and they would admit Junior into the school. Needless to say, it was full of country club-behaving scions of major families, with too much money and not enough brains. And then Rollins College took people like me in to help raise the average of the grades. My housemate at school was Anthony Perkins of *Psycho* fame — he was a little peculiar even then [laughs]. No, he really was! Tony didn't date when we were in school — that whole year, I don't remember him dating, ever. So when I'd come back from a date with a girl, he would start asking me questions. They would go from questions that were fine, like, "Where'd you go?" and "What did you eat?," to, "And then what did ya do?" and "Did ya blah blah blah?," and I'd suddenly realize what he was moving toward! So he was a bit of a voyeur — he was odd that way. And, Tony didn't treat people well, even his friends. He was somewhat competitive and somewhat defensive, and a little on the haughty side. He was not a star then and yet he was a little bit difficult, a little bit snobby. We saw each other quite a bit in Hollywood while he was going with Tab Hunter, and again we would have very abrupt conversations. Then he got mad at me, by the way, because some movie magazine found out that we had been at Rollins together and interviewed me. I really didn't say anything to get mad at, but he was angry that I gave an interview without asking his permission. Well, that was typically Tony.

**CULT MOVIES:** After Rollins, what happened next on the Road to Roger Corman?

**SAYER:** I came back to New York and, believe it or not, I went to work for the William Morris Agency, as a trainee, starting in the mailroom, much like Bette Davis did. I became an assistant agent and then an agent, and I left William Morris and went to work for another agency in New York called the Robert Lantz Agency, a small but prestigious office. Our clientele were Louis Jourdan and Hedy Lamarr and so on — it was one of those agencies that was very, very classy. Then [producer] David Susskind of Talent Associates hired me

Jay Sayer in 1957's *The Saga of the Viking Women and Their Voyage to the Waters of the Great Sea Serpent* (opposite page) and in 1958's *War of the Satellites* (above) — both Corman pictures

to become a casting director, to work under Ethel Winstant. Those were the golden days of live dramatic television. I did that for about a year or so.

**CM:** What were some of the David Susskind shows you cast?

**SAYER:** *Armstrong Circle Theater*, *Mr. Peepers*, *The Philco Playhouse*, *Appointment With Adventure*. And of course we made some movies as well, we did *Edge of the City* [1957] with Sidney Poitier and John Cassavetes. Talent Associates was sort of a little Rolls-Royce production operation in New York City and David Susskind was the hot young man of all the entrepreneurs — and we had a lot of 'em! He was sort of the Hilly Elkins of his time. I worked with all those kinds of people in New York, in the management end.

Then Talent Associates went on hiatus, and I decided to go out to California for a couple weeks, on vacation, and stay with a friend. I got out to California and I said, "I'm never going back [to New York]," because it was such a glorious place to live. L.A. in '56, there really was very little smog. Very little rain. No traffic problems. No racial problems. The first apartment I rented, I think for something like \$45 a month, had no lock on the door. You could climb around in a convertible and leave your camera sitting on the seat and go inside to Schwab's or somewhere, and come out and the camera was still there. It was really Heaven.

**CM:** How did you make your initial hookup with Corman?

**SAYER:** I went to work at an agency in California, the Paul Kohner Agency. One thing led to another and I met Mitzie McCall of the nightclub act McCall and Brill. Mitzie had appeared with Jerry Lewis in a movie [*You've Never Been Young*, 1955] and now she was



doing a featured role in a live production of *Best Foot Forward* on La Cienega Boulevard. She told me, "We just lost one of our chorus boys. Why don't you come on over and audition?" I bet you could get in," I said. "Sure, why not?" — I thought it'd be fun. So I went over and sang a chorus of "Tea for Two," did some soft-shoe dancing and whatever, and they hired me. And through Mitzie I met — you asked me about Corman, I know this story is a little circumlocutional! Through Mitzie I met her best friend, a gal named Barbara Crane, who is the mother of Melissa Gilbert and Sam Gilbert today.

**CM:** And she's in *Sorority Girl* [1957].

**SAYER:** Exactly! Barbara was going to go in to read for a role in a movie with Roger called *Teenage Doll* [1957], and she asked me to come and read with her — she said, "They always have such terrible people to read with you." I did, and Roger said to her, "I can't use you," but he turned to me and said, "I want you to read for another role." Which I did, and he said, "The part is yours." That's how I got started.

**CM:** That was the first of your five pictures for Corman.

**SAYER:** Roger is a phenomenon. First of all, I think almost everybody who works for Roger loves Roger. He's charming, he's very sweet, he's very kind, he's very bright. And he is very cheap. If Roger invites you to lunch, you've got to be prepared to pay for it! And you get paid scale. But as you know, half the people in the business today, he started them off on their careers. When I first started working for him, those were the days when people like Beverly Garland were the people he was discovering. Allison Hayes, Abby Dalton, Susan Cabot was very big with Roger, she was in four of the five movies I made with him. Et cetera. And he was

very loyal, so that every time he was doing a film, if there was a part for you, you got it. He'd just call you and say, "I got a part I want you to do," and you didn't even ask what it is, you went in and got a script and you did it. *Teenage Doll* was the first one.

**CM:** June Kenney was in three of your Corman movies—what was she like?

**SAYER:** Oh, she was a sweetie-pie. You'll notice, I sort of divide the world between the sweetie-pies and the smotnoxes [laughs]. She was about as un-Hollywood as you can get. She was very little, a tiny little thing, diminutive. And just very sweet, very easy to work with, and a nice girl. You'd never guess that she was an actress. You know, the cast of the film *Teenage Doll* was an interesting one, because Roger used all kinds of interesting young women to play the gang members. Ziva Roden was Miss Israel. Barboura Morris for a while was in almost every movie that Roger made, and her husband Monte Hellman was a guy who got his first directing job from Roger—

Monte went on to direct all kinds of things. So Roger was very clever not only in making exploitation films, but in discovering young talent...and exploiting them a little bit. But at least you were working and you got some film on yourself! And it was always fun, because you were working with some crazy kinda people [laughs]!

**CM:** On *Teenage Doll*, your first movie, did you get any direction from Corman?

**SAYER:** No. You never do. First of all, it was one take, and you knew that up front. Now, if the sound man or the light man said, "We need another take," then there was another take. If you [the actor] wanted another take with Roger, then you had to flub your lines up and say, "Oh, shit!" [Laughs] But you had to say, "Oh, shit," 'cause then they had to redo it. If you just flubbed your lines, he'd keep it anyway!

You did a rehearsal, of course, 'cause Roger wanted to block it and make sure how it went. But that was it, and then you did one take. And, no, you never sat down with Roger and asked, "Now, what's the character's motivation?" — no. He assumed that you were gonna give him what he wanted. If you didn't, he kept it in anyway — but you didn't work for him again.

**CM:** So everybody had to be on their toes at all times.

**SAYER:** Absolutely. I think a lot of us that he used had done theater before. In fact, if you look at *Teenage Doll* where I play a psychopathic rapist, and then the next film I did for him [*Sorority Girl*], you'd think it was two different actors, because I overacted in the first one, being used to doing theater in New York, where you project and play to a live audience and to the balcony. No one had told me, and I hadn't quite figured it out yet, but in film, most people just whisper. So in *Teenage Doll* I was yelling and carrying on, and Roger loved it. When it came out and I went to see it, I ran out of the theater screaming, because I scared myself! So, you learn through experience with Roger: No, he doesn't really release you except doing a run-through for the blocking, and he no doesn't really work with you very much as a, quote, director. Certainly not like, say, Coppola or Cassavetes or the New York directors.

**CM:** You're only in *Teenage Doll* for what?, four or five minutes, but I thought that was a memorable scene you had there.

**SAYER:** It certainly was — I got hysterical [laughs]. As you said, it was only for a couple minutes, but who could ever forget you? That's why Roger hired me: When he auditioned me in the office, he said, "Let's do this scene," and I read it, and I was able to do a good cold reading — and got a little crazy and hysterical. He said, "Great! You got the role." And he said, "Gimme just that when we do the film." So I did.

**CM:** Your character starts out so sympathetic to June Kenney, and then you "build" until you're ready to attack her. I not only thought your performance was effective, but that it was also an interesting piece of writing.

**SAYER:** He's like a poor soul, but once he gets an erection, you gotta put him behind bars [laughs]! I believe it was that role that led Roger to think of me later for the role of "Senja, My Son" in *Viking Women*, because that's certainly an emotional role. By the way, I'll tell you a cute anecdote for *Teenage Doll*. Remember that June Kenney hits me over the head with the bottle? It was a little apprehensive, and they explained to me, "No, it's paraffin, very thin wax. When it hits your head, it just crumbles and you really will feel only a slight pressure, nothing at all." I went, "Oh, Okay!" Well, some idiot filled the bottle with liquid to make it look realistic. Therefore, instead of crumbling over my head like paraffin does, when she hit me over the head with the bottle, I went out like a light. Roger yelled cut and they went to set up for the next scene, and somebody must have said, "Uh...Jay...come on. Scene's over. Get up." Then they realized I was out like a light. Almost every picture I'm in, we had an incident like that. I'll tell you a story later about *Viking Women and the Sea Serpent* with Betsy Jones-Moreland, who by the way I got into the Roger

Corman films. She was a friend of mine, we were in an acting workshop together.

**CM:** Susan Cabot told me the same kind of story about a supposedly harmless bottle. In a Corman picture called *The Wasp Woman* [1959], they threw a breakaway bottle at her but, again, somebody filled it first, so it hit like a rock.

**SAYER:** You spoke to Susan??

**CM:** I was pretty friendly with Susan about 20 years ago.

**SAYER:** Oh, for heaven's sake. Susan and I dated. Did you know that she had dated Sydney Pollack and was quite in love with him? That was a very serious relationship. How is Susan doing? Do you know what's happening with her now?

**CM:** [pause] You don't know what happened, do you?

**SAYER:** No.

**CM:** Well...I don't wanna be the one to tell you!

**SAYER:** No, it's all right. Because my life is full of violent stories of dear friends being killed or dying violent deaths.

**CM:** Okay, then here's another one: She was murdered by her own son.

**SAYER:** Oh my God. Oh my God. Well, Susan was very passionate, as you know, and had a temper, and I imagine she probably produced a son who was volatile.

**CM:** What else do you remember about Susan?

**SAYER:** Oh, Susan was a delight. Susan was very intense. She had a great sense of humor. Susan also was from New York. When you say that somebody's from New York, that says something about them immediately. She was a New York girl and she was fun and she was great to work with. We became friends and we'd go out to the beach together and go out for dinner and stuff. Of course, Susan working for Roger Corman was a little bit of a [comedian] because at one point Susan was well on her way to becoming a movie star, playing every Indian princess at Universal. We just got along fine and had a lot of laughs together. She could be difficult — she was very strong-willed, had a very strong personality. And she had a trained soprano voice. I remember once sitting in a restaurant at Malibu, having dinner with her, and out of a clear blue sky with no warning, she let out a haughty, fortissimo high C or a B or something — everybody in the restaurant turned around and looked! And she stopped and went back to eating her salad and said [casually], "Oh, that felt good." [Laughs] That singing in the restaurant, I was a little embarrassed by it — but it was funny.

**CM:** I liked her a lot but I sometimes got a little nervous when I was out in public with her. You never knew what she was going to do next.

**SAYER:** Or what was gonna come out of that mouth next! But that was what was kind of fun about Susan. Incidentally, she and Roger dated a little bit. And every gal that dated Roger,

including Beverly, Susan, Abby Dalton, etc., made it a point to tell me that he was a perfect gentleman, he never came on to them. Maybe he was shy with women, but they all made the comment. And I think all of them really wanted to go to bed with him, and he disappointed them. Well, Roger was a very good-looking man when he was younger.

**CM:** Funny you should say that. I was watching one of your movies today when it occurred to me that you looked a little like him.

**SAYER:** A little bit, yeah. And Roger and I got along beautifully. I had done a lot of comedy, including some stand-up comedy. (Jerry Lewis once said to me, "You're very Chaplin-esque.") Everything I did, Roger would scream with laughter. He was over at the house frequently. I lived up on Wonderland, in the Canyon. He just thought I was a hoot and a hoot, and he asked my opinion on things as a writer – he knew I wrote and had directed, etc. Like one of the things I did, I directed a production of *Bell, Book and Candle* in the Valley, at the Valley Playhouse [in 1960]. He would very often ask my advice and ask me, "How 'bout rewriting a scene?" or whatever that was not uncommon.

**CM:** What else were you doing to make a living in 1957-58 as you were doing all these pictures for Corman? You couldn't have been living off of a Corman salary!

**SAYER:** Well, you collected unemployment. I supplemented it by doing the theater work – for instance, when I was filming *Viking Women and the Sea Serpent*, at night I was appearing in a Billy Barnes Revue. Billy Barnes was a very famous comedy writer and songwriter in those days – he wrote the song "Something Cool," and also "Too Long at the Fair" that Barbra Streisand did. So there was that, and the movies for Roger, I did some voiceovers around town, and the unemployment. And I modeled at the Art Institute, I did some "life classes" – not in the complete nude, I wore a little posing strap. Like everybody, you sort of fake whatever you can get. And you live fairly cheaply [laughs], to put it bluntly. As you know, from talking to anybody who's ever been an actor, you make certain sacrifices until you really make it big. You live a very conservative lifestyle.

**CM:** Next you were in *Sorority Girl* with Susan Cabot and Dick Miller.

**SAYER:** And Barbara Crane, who went on to raise two stars [Melissa and Sara Gilbert]. For *Sorority Girl*, Roger rented out Ruta Lee's mansion up in Laurel Canyon. It had been some famous silent movie star's house, but I don't remember which one. Afterwards, Ruta wasn't very happy, because the living room was carpeted in white white carpeting, and of course there were oil stains all over it. And other damage was done to the house. When she agreed to rent it, I'm sure that assurances were given to her about the condition it would be left in. Roger, God bless him, probably said, "Oh,

that was like that when we rented it," etc. I don't think she ever agreed to rent her house again!

**CM:** You're the comedy relief in *Sorority Girl*. **SAYER:** Right, in a couple scenes with Dick Miller, one of them an exterior filmed down at USC. Dick Miller and Jonathan Haze were in almost every movie Roger made in those days. Dick and Jonathan, again, were both very New York. Friendly professionally, but not really friendly. I think part of the problem may have been, I'm from an upper-middle-class family and had certain privileges, and I think maybe they came from a less affluent background. I'm just guessing. But sometimes, as you know, that'll cause a little rift. Usually not in show business, though – most people in show business just bond. I'd run into Dick all the time for years after that and I'd always get a hello. But we never went to the movies, we never had dinner. Same thing with Jonathan – Jonathan was even, I think, more unfriendly in some respects. Now, also, they may have been into the drug scene and I wasn't, I don't know. That's another thing that separates people in Hollywood. I didn't even know about it in those days [laughs]. I was terribly naive. I had smoked pot once in New York, with all people Liz Smith the columnist and her girlfriend. I laughed myself to sleep – we laughed so hard, I fell asleep in their apartment. I woke up the next morning on the couch and I thought, "I don't think I wanna do that again." That was it for, like, years.

No, Jonathan and Dick were both very nice

June Kenney. We never really had any bitches or difficult women. (Beverly Garland was a very powerful and strong woman, but very sweet and very lovely.) Barboura was a good actress...interesting quality...and just as nice as she could be. Now, again, I didn't get friendly with her, we didn't go out socially. I did go out with Abby Dalton and I did go out with Susan but I didn't go out with Barboura. But I liked her, she was very nice. I'm surprised nothing happened to her [career-wise], she had an interesting quality, like an Eva Marie Saint.

**CM:** You keep mentioning Beverly Garland in connection with Corman – how did you know her when you were never in a movie with her?

**SAYER:** I lived up in the hills, on Wonderland Avenue in Laurel Canyon, with a guy named Beach Dickerson, who was also in a lot of Roger's movies. So I lived with Beach, and Beach knew all the people from the previous chapter of the Roger Corman saga. All sorts of people came to parties that we had at Beach's. Beverly Garland, Tab Hunter, Michael Landon, Dennis Hopper, Natalie and R.J. [Robert Wagner], Chad Everett and Ahna Capri, who he was going with at the time, Corey Allen, John Ashley – I can't even begin to name them all, just a lot of stars and other people coming and going to the parties. Helen Walker came to all of the parties! She lived next door to us in a little cottage that Beach owned, and by then of course she was an alcoholic and was no longer with 20th. Oh, I got to spend hours and hours with Helen, I adored her.

**CM:** Then the third movie you did for Corman

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"Years later my teenage son went to private school with Charlie Bronson's son, and I saw Charlie at Parents Day. Wouldn't even say hello. Yeah, Charlie Bronson was not pleasant."

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guys, I don't want to say I didn't like them. But they were more the type like... Charlie Bronson's a good example. Charlie was the star of another movie with Roger, *Machine-Gun Kelly* [1958] – that's probably the most legit film I did with Roger. Charles Bronson never spoke to any of us. Never. He played cards with the stuntmen, with the extras. Because he had much more in common with them than he did with the actors. Years later my teenage son went to private school with Charlie Bronson's son, and I saw Charlie at Parents Day. Wouldn't even say hello. Yeah, Charlie Bronson was not pleasant. But, as I say, he played cards with the stuntmen, with the extras. Jonathan and Dick were a little bit like that, they were...I dunno...diamonds in the rough. Louie the Louie. Very Damon Runyon-esque.

**CM:** Barbara Morris was in three of your five Cormans, including *Sorority Girl* – what was she like?

**SAYER:** Oh, Barboura was a sweetheart. Like

was the big one: *Viking Women and the Sea Serpent*.

**SAYER:** You could do a whole book about *Viking Women* [laughs]. At the time there was a movie in production called *The Vikings* [1958] with Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis and that's why Roger made *Viking Women*. He decided to do an exploitation film that could benefit from that other film, which was a massive production. When Roger called me about doing a part, he said, "It's really for a 15-year-old." I was 24. "But," he said, "I want you to do it anyway."

**CM:** The role of Senja was written for a 15-year-old?

**SAYER:** Yes, it was written for an actor named Robin something, who had been in a couple of Roger's movies. I knew him quite well – little guy, blood curly hair, and much younger than I was. That's who Roger originally was going to use in the role, and then he called me in to his office at Ziv Studios and he said, "No, I want to use you. I know you're 24 but...you'll be 15."

He said he knew I could get away with it! So he told me the part was mine and then, "Go over to Western Costume and pick out your own costume." So I did, I went over to Western Costume and I literally grabbed every piece of junky jewelry they had there, which is why in the movie I'm wearing a tiara and bracelets and you name it. That diaper, that was the only thing I had to put around my bottom...that fur vest...the tacky, awful shoes, etc. When I first saw myself in that outfit, I went, "Oh, my God!"

**GM:** I interviewed Richard Devon, who plays your father in the movie, and he was the same kind of get-up. He said he thought he looked like Genghis Khan.

**SAYER:** Exactly! Incidentally, I did an interview for a Canadian magazine called *Take One* when I was teaching at the University of Western Ontario. The name of the article was "Senjanyocin" and the reason for that was: My name in *Viking Women* was Senja, and Dick Devon kept calling out, "Senja, my son! Senja, my son!" And I said to the interviewer, "It sounds like an antibiotic!" [Laughs] Senjanyocin! And when the magazine came out, on the cover was me in a horned Viking helmet, and then underneath in big type it said "Senjanyocin"!

There's a scene in *Viking Women* with all of us riding horses in Bronson Canyon and we're galloping pretty full-throttle, and then we slow down and we go into the cave. In the scene were Dick Devon, playing my father, and me, and a bunch of stuntmen. I was supposed to lead the charge into the cave. But as you know, you can never control what's going on when you're on horseback, so at the last second something happened, maybe my horse pulled back, and suddenly there Dick was, leading the charge. Well, it turned out that the opening to the cave wasn't big enough for a man and a horse. That's typically Roger — Roger had no idea, 'cause he didn't ride a horse, what any of this stuff entailed or involved. So as Dick went to go in, the horse scraped him along the right-side wall and it tore all the skin off his knee area. He spent the rest of the movie wearing a drain on his knee, and limping. Luckily, he wore a costume that covered it. That was another one of the famous Corman incidents.

Another one is the one with Betsy Jones-Moreland that I said I would tell you again. At Iverson's Ranch, Roger plans a scene where a

group of us, a lot of stuntmen and Betsy and some of the other Viking women and myself come riding down onto a plateau at the edge of a cliff. A rather high cliff. Roger was going to shoot this as a long shot from another cliff a distance away from there — it made for an interesting shot. But what Roger doesn't realize is that, unlike a Jeep where you press the brake and it stops, with horses it doesn't quite work that way. You rein them in, but if you're the one closest to the edge of the cliff, and the horses behind you come in a little too fast, or your horse shies a little bit and doesn't stop, you go over the cliff. So we try to plan it once and we see it's gonna be a real problem, we see that somebody could get killed. So Roger's on the other mountaintop and he's yelling into an electric megaphone, "All right, people, let's try this." On our cliff, Betsy takes the electric megaphone away from the assistant director who's standing there and she says, "Roger This is much too dangerous. I'm not doing it." Roger yells back to her from the other mountaintop, "It's in your contract, Betsy." And she yells back, "In your hat, Roger!" [Laughs] I thought, "Well, she's never gonna work for him again," but of course she did many times. But that's another Roger Corman-ism, where he has no idea what it's like to ride horses. If we had done that scene, somebody would have gotten killed, I think. They would have gone off the cliff. So thank heavens for Betsy!

**GM:** Both Betsy and Susan Cabot told me the scenes on the Viking boat were no picnic.

**SAYER:** We were on the beach at either Crystal Cove or Paradise Cove, I forget which, and they did a scene with the Viking women out on the ocean in their boat. They finished doing the scene and Roger yelled cut, and they went to do the next set-up. The Viking boat was being pulled around by [an off-camera] tugboat, and the tugboat came in...but no one told the tugboat captain to bring the boat with the girls back in. Well, by the time they remembered that all the girls were on this boat, it was well on its way to Catalina Island [laughs].

**GM:** Nobody noticed that all the girls suddenly weren't anywhere around?

**SAYER:** Not somehow or other, they didn't bother to notice that the girls' Viking boat hadn't come in until they were ready to do the next scene, and then it was like, "...Where are the girls?" And somebody said, "Oh, shit-they're still on the boat." We could still sorta see the boat, but way off in the distance! Well, the girls on it were hysterical—they were really frightened. When they came back and got off the boat, they were pretty upset, because they weren't sure anyone was ever gonna come and get them. The water wasn't rough that day, it was a nice day, but I would have been scared to death, too, to be on a boat that was just drifting out to sea, and nobody paying any attention.

Oh, the glamour of making movies: You'd come into the studio, Ziv Studios, at five

o'clock in the morning, get made-up. Of course the grips and those people got to the doughnuts before you, so you'd have a cup of coffee and maybe a doughnut. Get on a bus, go out to Malibu, and you're standing in the sand all day, the sun beating down on you. And the wind is blowing, so you got all that sand caught in your makeup, which is practically eating your skin away. It was really "glamorous"!

**GM:** An actress named Kipp Hamilton was originally signed to star in *Viking Women*, but she was replaced by Abby Dalton.

**SAYER:** That's right, Abby wasn't supposed to do the lead, Kipp Hamilton was. But Kipp's agent was Lillian Small, the sister of Dore Schary, and Lillian didn't want her to do the movie — Lillian told Kipp, "Your career's just starting and you've done a couple of prestigious things. I think doing a B-movie for Roger Corman isn't the best way to go." And Kipp had already accepted the part — she'd come in, we'd met together, etc. But on the advice of Lillian Small, Kipp called and said, "No, I'm not doing it." Originally Abby was supposed to play Kipp's character's younger sister so Roger promoted through the ranks, he said to Abby, "You'll do the lead role." Abby asked, "Well, what about now having my [real-life] sister to play my younger sister?" and Roger said, "Great." So Abby's sister, Shirley [Winden], came in. Very pretty. Very, very pretty.

**GM:** And then she got injured, falling off a horse.

**SAYER:** Yeah, I remember it only very vaguely but there was an accident and she did get hurt. Not scarred for life, but she certainly couldn't go on with the movie, because those roles were very physical, and we all did our own stuntwork. Since June Kenney had worked in several other films for Roger, they put her in the role of the younger sister after Shirley got hurt. By the way, there are a couple of scenes in the movie where the younger sister is played by Shirley, Abby's real sister, and then in other scenes it's June Kenney. Roger wasn't about to re-shoot any footage—are you kidding? So you've got two different actresses playing the role, if you look real carefully!

**GM:** I like June Kenney — I wish she'd made more than just a handful of movies!

**SAYER:** You're right, nothing much happened after the Roger Corman flicks with June, it was like nobody else used her. Abby Dalton went on to have a very good career...

**GM:** I remember *The Jonathan Winters Show*.

**SAYER:** Oh, yeah, and *The Joey Bishop Show* and the show with Jackie Cooper [Hennessey]. Abby was a very physical person. She used to live out at a ranch in Topanga Canyon with a famous jazz bass player named Joe Mondragon — and one of her close friends was Robert Blake! Abby was a wild chick when she was young! It's funny because she became very much "the Fifth Avenue-Madison Avenue

lady" later on in life. And she's got quite a mouth on her, God bless her [laughs]! But as you know, so did Susan. And so does Beverly. Oh boy! Which is part of the reason why they were so much fun. And, oh, and so does Rita Lee — I mean, with Rita you have to say, "Rita-stop! You're worse than a Marine!"

**GM:** You did your own "stunt" in *Viking Women* too.

**SAYER:** Right, that scene where the tree branch knocks me off the horse. I had to ride at a canter right into that branch and bend down at literally the last second, so that it looked to the camera like the branch hit me. Then, of course, the next shot was of me landing on the ground. They cut it together cleverly enough so you think you see me fall off the horse onto the ground. It was weird: They had stunt people around, but we had to do our own.

**GM:** Some of the other people in the cast: Betsy Moran?

**SAYER:** Oh! I adore and love Betsy, she was a sweetie-pie. Betsy and I were in an acting workshop together and became very, very good friends and talked about all kinds of stuff. No romantic interest, just buddies. I told Roger about Betsy and he read her for the movie and she got in. Betsy had a quality like a Patricia Neal, and she was a very big woman as you know, very tall. And very womanly, not girlish. June Kenney was a little girl; Betsy was a woman. Wonderful voice, good good actress. And a lovely human being. Sally Todd was another one who was in *Viking Women* — she wound up going with Troy Donahue.

**GM:** Sally Todd: Sweetie-pie or smotnoise?

**SAYER:** Sally was a sweetie-pie. Sally looked like Lina Turner in those days, she was really gorgeous. She was probably the prettiest one in *Viking Women*.

**GM:** I don't get very good reports on Brad Jackson.

**SAYER:** Now that's a sad story. Brad Jackson and I were very, very, very close... and he was crazy even then. I remember one night he asked me to stay over, we were going to go to the Easter Mass the next morning at the Hollywood Bowl, and... [Sigh] He went into this whole thing, he thought he was the reincarnation of Rudolph Valentino, and he talked about himself in the third person: "Brad Jackson can't do this because it would interfere with his career," "Brad Jackson can't eat this food because it's not healthy for his body" and so on. He was a sweetie-pie — I knew him before he got crazy. And, as I say, we were very close. I mean, the other people and I were just friends, etc., but Brad and I were like buddy-buddies. He was so sweet. Very vulnerable. And gorgeous. He was a handsome, handsome man.

**GM:** Richard Devon?

**SAYER:** Richard's a sweetheart. But Richard again is another one who would probably, if he had his choice, be playing cards with the stunt-

men. Richard's "one of the guys." And Richard had a very good career — he worked for a lot of other people besides Roger. The only other film that I did in Hollywood, other than Roger's, was *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* [1957].

**GM:** Devon had nothing good to say about Corman when I interviewed him — Corman was so cheap, Corman got him hurt...

**SAYER:** First of all, Roger really is cheap. I mean, I wasn't kidding when I talked about the lunches. Roger and I went out to scout locations for *Viking Women*, and why he invited me to come along I don't know. Various people that I have worked for have had crushes on me. I don't mean sexual crushes, I mean... like "talent crushes," where they got a kick out of me and they wanted to have me around almost 24 hours a day. Roger was a little bit like that; Jerry Lewis was definitely like that. I was with Jerry's Comedy Workshop over at Paramount for almost a year, and then one day I arrived at the Paramount gates and the guard told me, "Tim sorry, but I have instructions not to let you on the lot." That's the way he let me go. Jerry's very peculiar.

Anyway, Roger and I went out to scout *Viking Women* locations and I went along with him, as a favor I guess. We stopped somewhere to have lunch and he said, "Oh, I don't have any money on me, would you catch this, please?" That was basically what he did every time I had lunch with him! I always would say to him, "Roger, you are the cheapest son of a bitch I've ever worked for!" And he would say, "Yes, but you're working for me, aren't ya?" We'd both laugh, but there was a lot of truth to it: "I keep you working but, yeah, I stock ya for lunch!"

But Richard Devon got hurt [the knee incident]. I think the reason why Richard might be more "down" on Roger than myself or some other people is because Richard went on to have a fully expanded career so that, although he worked for Roger, he wasn't quite as grateful to him as some of us are. So he's dealing with what Roger was like on a very realistic level, and not getting sort of sucked in by the charm and the boyishness. Richard's seeing only the fact that he was exploited, and that he got hurt. And that he really didn't need to have gotten hurt. If you [the director] are gonna do a scene with your actors on horses galloping into a cave, you do your homework. Also, it raises the question, why did Roger have to have a group of mounted riders charging into a cave? You don't usually charge your horse into a cave, you get off the horse and you walk into the cave. So I can see where Richard would be a little more resentful!

**GM:** And your performance in the movie...?

**SAYER:** I based it a little bit on Jay Robinson, who played the Emperor in *The Robe* [1953]. I did sort of think about that as a possible role model.

**GM:** The part does require a 15-year-old so



More of Sayer's scenes in Corman's *The Saga of the Viking Women and Their Voyage to the Waters of the Great Sea Serpent*.

you are not right for the part, can we agree on that?

**SAYER:** Oh, yeah!

**CM:** So what's your most overacted scene, what's the scene where you cringe the most when you watch *Viking Women*?

**SAYER:** I don't know whether you realize it, but *Viking Women* was run on *Mystery Science Theatre*, that series with the puppets who poke fun at B movies. During the scene where I first come in and I slap Abby in the face, the puppets were saying things about my performance, like, "Don't hate me because I'm beautiful!" and "This lad needs a conflict management seminar!" [Laughs] In answer to your question, it's either that scene, or the scene after Abby killed the boar —

**CM:** The scene where you're whining, "I don't want to be saved by a girl-riff!"

**SAYER:** Yeah, that's it! I wasn't 15, and I was supposed to be a frightened teenager.

**CM:** You were 24 so it's terrible. But if you'd been 15, it would have been a great performance!

**SAYER:** Exactly! In fact, I think I come across a little gay because I'm not the right age. Suddenly when a man is acting like that, it's like, "Hmmmm..."! [Laughs] By the way, remember the "wild boar"? We laughed so hard at it, and Roger said, "Stop it, you people! You gotta get serious, you gotta do this scene!" It was a pig with false teeth [laughs]! For the shot where you see the pig with the spear through it, the spear was one of those things like the arrow around your head that you wear on Halloween.

By the way, another funny story — and this was my fault. Remember the scene where I get fire to Abby and Brad, who are tied to the stakes? And Susan calls upon Thor, god of the thunderbolt, and I get struck down by lightning? Well, I decided to be very "method." There was a puddle there, and I fell with my face in the puddle. I thought, "Oooh, that's gonna be good," "I'll be Orson Welles-ish," whatever. Except, stupid me doesn't realize that Roger has to film a fight scene between Brad Jackson and Dick Devon after that, and my body will be in the scene.

**CM:** So you had to lie face-down in the puddle the whole time?

**SAYER:** Literally, I had to take a deep breath and stick my face in there, and then Roger would have to cut every time I couldn't hold my breath any more. I really got hoisted on my

own petard with that one — I got a little too clever!

**CM:** In the shot of Abby Dalton and Brad Jackson at the stakes and the kindling burning, it looks to me like the flames get awful close.

**SAYER:** Oh, yeah! If the wind had shifted, they might have gotten a little sunburned! That could happen in a Roger Corman film. It's all about money. He's the world's best businessman, he's made, what?, billions of dollars, I think. "The movie will be made, and the movie will be made as quickly and as cheaply as possible" — I think it became his *raison d'être*. Incidentally, there was going to be a scene in *Viking Women* where I try to rape Abby Dalton. But that was cut 'cause it got a little too graphic.

After the scene where Abby and I arm-wrestle, etc., she comes to my room and... I don't remember exactly what happens, but we get into a fight and I suddenly pin her down and I'm going to rape her. Then she reminds me that she just saved my life, saved me from the wild boar, so I let her go and I'm pretty shook up and so is she. Apparently we went too far in the scene, so they had to cut it. But I've got some stills where, literally, she's lying down with her legs apart and I'm on top of her — pretty raunchy!

**CM:** *Viking Women* was your only good-sized movie part, you must have gone to see it when it came out.

**SAYER:** I went to see *Viking Women* with Barbara Crane and Mitzi McCall. We were the Three Musketeers. What I didn't know was that sitting behind me were Billy Barnes and Bob Rogers, who were producing the *Billy Barnes* show that I was in at the time. Mitzi is rambunctious, and Barbara and Mitzi and I are sitting there screaming our heads off at this movie. Remember the scene where the Viking women's boat gets smashed and they wash up on the shore and they're lined up like sardines? Audiences scream with laughter. But here's what's interesting: People think Roger is camp and kitsch and that he does that stuff on purpose. Truth be known... no! Roger didn't know that was funny. He just said, "Go lie down on the beach, all of you," and, "Scrunch up more, I gotta get ya into camera." So they wound up on the beach lying one by one like the Rockemans [Laughs]! Then people who see the movie read into it and say, "Oh, God, Roger Corman is funny, that is marvelous." And I'm thinking, "He didn't do it on purpose!"

**CM:** What's the punchline to the "Billy Barnes was sitting behind me" anecdote you started?

**SAYER:** Only that they were sitting behind me and I didn't know it, and at the *Billy Barnes* show rehearsal the next day, as I walked in, Billy said, "Senja, my son!" And I said, "Oh, shit!" [Laughs] They kidded me for... it must have been weeks!

**CM:** You were back to just one scene in *War of the Satellites* [1958].

**SAYER:** On *War of the Satellites*, Roger

called me and said there was a scene in the script that takes place on location in Texas, with hundreds of head of cattle and 15 or 20 cowboys sitting around a campfire when a little missile comes down. Then he said, "You know how ridiculous that is for one of my films. I'm not going to Texas or getting hundreds of head of cattle and 15 cowboys!" [Laughs] He said, "Would you rewrite it for you and another person? And make it a comedy scene. Make it two teenagers. You figure out what the setting is and what they're doing, and rewrite the scene." So I wrote a scene for him and he said, "This is terrific, I love it," and Mitzi McCall and I did it, a scene of just the two of us in a convertible up in Mulholland Canyon smooching, and all kinds of teenage jokes and stuff.

Another funny Roger Corman story: After I did my scene for *War of the Satellites*, I showed up one day while they were doing interiors. And since I was on the set, Roger said, "Don't just stand there. Let's put ya to work." He wanted to use me as an extra in that scene; he said, "Just don't show your face to the camera 'cause they'll recognize you from the other scene." I put on the costume, but I didn't have any socks on. So they wrapped my ankles in black tape [laughs]. You see me getting on and getting off elevators. That's very Roger Corman. You go to visit the set when you've already finished your part, and he will put you to work as an extra!

**CM:** Your final Corman: One creepy scene as a gay gangland type in *MACHINE-GUN KELLY*.

**SAYER:** There's a scene in a bar in *MACHINE-GUN KELLY* that starts with somebody lighting somebody else's cigarette, and as the camera pulls back, the cigarette's in my mouth, and then you see that it's a guy lighting it. A guy's lighting another guy's cigarette, and they're looking into each other's eyes, or whatever, and you realize it's a gay bar. Well, the guy lighting my cigarette was Gene Corman, Roger's brother. Now, as nice as Roger is, Gene is a putz. Gene is not a nice person. I had known Gene before I knew Roger, and he was not a friendly man at all. But here we go again: Roger used his brother as an extra! And his brother was an agent at MCA! But that's, again, a Roger-ism. Suddenly I was doing this scene with Gene and I said to Roger, "How does Gene feel about this? 'Cause I don't think he likes me very much." Roger said, "Oh, you know Gene, he doesn't like anybody very much."

"Unless they're important!" I felt like saying. Then I thought, "No, no postscripts. Stop while you're ahead!"

**CM:** I don't think that shot you describe is in the movie, the lighting of the cigarette.

**SAYER:** That's funny... when *MACHINE-GUN KELLY* was first released, it did have that shot. We had to do it two or three times because the members of the crew got hysterical with laughter, 'cause... well, Gene Corman is so homo-

phobic [laughs] that I'm sure he was very uncomfortable doing that scene.

**CM:** Did you enjoy doing the rest of that scene with Susan Cabot?

**SAYER:** That was fun to do, that dishy scene at the table. I said to Roger, "If I go too far, tell me," and Roger looked at me as if to say, "Yeah, right!" — cause with Roger, you do it, it's one take and it's done. I think *Machine-Gun Kelly* was only one day's work but it was a delightful experience. Half the people in it I'd already worked with, and I again got Mitzi McCall in it.

**CM:** Did you stop accepting roles from Roger Corman, or did he stop offering them to you?

**SAYER:** I think he stopped offering them to me, and I got much more involved in directing and writing. As you can tell, for a while there, I did one Corman picture after another, right in a row. I don't remember why [it ended], but there certainly was no argument, he certainly wasn't disappointed in me, or I in him. The last movie I made for him was *Machine-Gun Kelly* and he was very happy and satisfied with my work in that. So...I don't know.

**CM:** Why did you never make movies for anybody but Corman?

**SAYER:** Well, I did the one at 20th Century-Fox, *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*, and that was fun 'cause I used to ride out to the L.A. Airport in a limousine with Jayne Mansfield, Lili Gentle and Joan Blondell. And if you had those conversations on tape, you'd have another book. Blondell loved to poke fun at Mansfield. People keep saying Mansfield was really a very intelligent, bright woman just pretending to be a ditzy. Uh-uh! Not! Not! She was such a ditzy! Blondell I had known in New York when I was an agent—and you don't start with Blondell, she really was a bright, tough lady. So the whole ride was Blondell poking fun at Jayne Mansfield.

**CM:** Right to her face?

**SAYER:** Oh, yeah! Mansfield started laughing...halfway knowing she was getting it, but the other half thinking, "What is she saying...?" [Laughs] Lili Gentle and I would sit there and watch this going on and, like, be pinching each other's legs or elbowing each other.

I think one of the main reasons why I primarily worked for Roger was, every time I turned around, he had another thing for me. And I didn't really pursue the career that hard. There's a movie called *The Way We Were* [1973] and Robert Redford plays a guy who writes a book called 'The Ice Cream Man,' and the beginning of the book is, "He was like the country in which he was born, everything came easily to him." Because I had been a casting director in New York and had been on the Broadway stage as a child actor, and then was an agent, both in New York and again in L.A., I knew everybody. So the stuff sorta just came to me — I got a lot of television, I did all

the court shows and Richard Diamond and so on. But I didn't really push it that hard. And I guess my agent wasn't that fantastic.

**CM:** You probably got most of the work yourself.

**SAYER:** Well, with Roger I certainly did, yeah. And then also I got sick of acting—I decided I preferred writing and directing instead, so I directed *Bell, Book and Candle* in the Valley, and I had a few other directing offers. And I wrote a film called *The Shirt Off Her Back*.

**CM:** Was it ever made?

**SAYER:** Yeah. It was an independent, sort of an exploitation film, with [in the cast] me and a Las Vegas comic name of Tommy Moe Raft. We filmed it in Las Vegas, at the ranch where Elizabeth Taylor and Eddie Fisher spent their honeymoon. I had fun writing it, 'cause I got to do every slapstick joke in the world, a lot of puns and stuff. It was full of schick. That was around 1960. Tommy Moe Raft was a working comic in one of those burlesque shows in Las Vegas, literally with the tear-away dresses on the girls and the big shoes on the comic and the drums [trumshots], etc. We hired him to play the lead because it was written for someone like that. What we didn't know was that he was illiterate. So when it was time to start shooting the film, he hadn't learned any of his lines 'cause he couldn't read. We shot that entire film with me feeding him his lines, and we would do three lines at a time. That was torturous. It also ruined the comic timing.

**CM:** When were you in Jerry Lewis' Comedy Workshop? What movies did you work on for him?

**SAYER:** No, I didn't make any movies. That was '58, '59. Mitzi McCall was in it and Jo Anne Worley was in it and I was in it and, oh, a whole bunch of people that you would know. Jerry used me to write a lot of material for TV specials or scenes in movies and things. He was also developing me as a talent, to put into the movies, but that never happened. He'd call me and say, "I got a small part for you in such-and-such a picture" and I'd say, "Great! When do I get a script?" Then it wouldn't happen. That happened, ooh, about five or six times. But that's typically Jerry. He's another one who, when he loves you he loves you too much, and then...he doesn't love ya enough! Jerry's very difficult.

**CM:** What did you do to get on his bad side, that he barred you from the Paramount lot?

**SAYER:** No, nothing, it was just...the thrill wore off.

**CM:** What wrap-up comments would you like to make about your Corman years? Well, year. Well, 11 months!

**SAYER:** [Laughs] I was just very lucky, in one sense, that I had the career I did with Roger and with all those people. But I somehow knew that it wasn't something I necessarily wanted to devote my life to. And then I met

my now-wife Constance, and she was a member of the Baha'i faith, and she introduced me to Baha'i and I became a Baha'i. That changed all my spiritual values. Suddenly, being a star in show biz...

**CM:** Not that big a deal any more?

**SAYER:** Lemme tell you something: I lived with Sammy Davis for a while and we did a play together called *The Desperate Hours* — he did an interracial version of it at the Hollywood Center Theater while he was making *Forgy and Bess* [1959] for Otto Preminger. That was the period when Sammy tried to marry Kim Novak, and [Novak's boss at Columbia Pictures] Harry Cohn sent the gangsters on the train to Las Vegas and headed them off and told Sammy that if he tried that again, they'd break every bone in his body. So Sammy was going through a bad depressive state and asked me if I'd come and stay with him up at the house for a while. What I'm saying is, I'd seen an awful lot of stuff [like that], on "the inside" of show biz. I'd hung around with a lot of movie stars, Garland, Shirley MacLaine, the whole Rat Pack thing through Sammy. And...I dunno...suddenly it started to seem depressing. Then when I became a Baha'i, that changed my whole life around; my world vision and my sense of why—I'm here got a little more introspective, a little more philosophical, a little more altruistic than just my career. By the way, do you want to hear something really funky? When I met Constance and she introduced me to Baha'i, her name was Constance Sayer. When we got married, she didn't have to change it! At the wedding, when the guy said, "Do you, Constance Sayer, take Jay Sayer..." everyone started smiling.

**CM:** Sounds like an Ozarks wedding!

**SAYER:** [Laughs] Exactly — "You're marryin' your cousin, how lovely!" Anyway...talking to you today, it's interesting to find out from you how these people [has Corman movie co-stars] wound up. I was one of the few people who said, "I've had it with this business" because I got married and I wanted to have a family, and I knew that [an actor's salary] was not reliable. So my wife talked me into this, and I'm glad I did it: I went back to school and finished up my B.A. and then an M.A. and then a Ph.D., etc. I've been a professor all over the world—Australia, Canada, the West Indies...

Right now, if you asked me if I wanted to go back into the business, I'd have to say that I don't think the current Hollywood has any resemblance whatsoever to the business that I knew. I mean, when we're talking Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera and Janet Jackson's boob, instead of Katharine Hepburn, Audrey Hepburn, Sophia Loren, etc. — it just doesn't have the same class. But it was a fun thing to do and I loved it. I had great times and met some really lovely people. ■

Max Von  
Sydow in *The  
Greatest  
Story Ever  
Told*

# Jesus Christ Horror Star

Fright Film Credits of Actors Who Played the Messiah

by Joe Wawrzyniak

**J**esus Christ is without a doubt the dream role for any serious and ambitious young actor to portray. Let's face it: parts don't come any bigger or better than the Son of God, who had the power to heal the sick and walk on water, inspired many a man to aspire to greatness, defined the Roman Empire, and died on the cross for man's sins only to return to life a few days later. What's interesting to note is that a sizeable number of actors who play Christ subsequently wind up in horror films. Some only have a single fright flick to their credit; others pop up in a bunch of 'em.

But the general principle remains the same: After you play Jesus, it's basically inevitable that you eventually do a horror film or two.

Whether this is either a foreboding sign of the impending apocalypse or proof positive that playing Christ is a guaranteed career killer I'll leave up to readers to decide. So, with that obligatory intro stuff out of the way, here's the list of thespians both famous and unknown alike who played Jesus and then added a horror film or two to their resumes.

**WILLEM DAFOE** Became the center of a storm of controversy as a direct result of portraying a deeply flawed and reluctant all-too-human Jesus in Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Wound up scoring a deliciously juicy lead and even got himself an Oscar nomination for his spot-on spooky performance as Max Schreck the genuine lethal bloodsucker silent screen thespian in the excellent *Shadow of a Vampire*.

**RALPH FIENNES** After supplying the voice of the messiah for the extremely odd and obscure animated feature *The Miracle Maker*, Fienness played the pimicious family-snuffing serial killer the Tooth Fairy in the intensely atrocious and unnecessary *Manhunter* remake *Red Dragon* and gave an especially haunting performance as a tormented schizophrenic in David Cronenberg's stupendously scary *Spider*.

**ZALMAN KING** One of my all-time favorite mondo wacko cult actors played an obviously Jewish phony huzzler con man Christ in *The Passover Plot*, an extremely controversial film that was essentially *The Last Temptation of Christ* of its day. (Donald Pleasance pops up in *The Passover Plot* as Pontius Pilate.) Next portrayed Zippy the Abbie Hoffman-esque hippie hero in the bang-up psycho acidhead doozy *Blue Sunshine* and appeared in the gory *ALIEN* copy *Galaxy of Terror* as a neurotic astronaut who gets killed.

**BELA LUGOSI** It's a little known fact that Lugosi starred as Christ on stage in Hungary. Of course, we all know about Bela's extraordinary

fright film credits, ranging from the Prince of Darkness in Todd Browning's *Dracula* to a slew of fabulous '40s Universal monster pics to uproarious genre send-ups starring either Abbott and Costello or the Bowery Boys to Ed Wood's legendary no-budget camp classic howler *Plan 9 from Outer Space*.

**CAMERON MITCHELL** Did the voice of Christ in *The Robe*. Cameron's fright film credits are legion. They run the gamut from sublime (*Maria Bava's Blood and Black Lace*) to shamefully underated (the slasher item *Silent Scream*, Greyston Clark's pre-*Predator* alien hunter sci-fi/horror opus *Without Warning*, the murder mystery thriller *Blood Lork*, the horror anthology *The Offspring*) to supremely silly (the awful *Nightmare in Rio*, the tacky *Raw Force*, Jerry Warren's chummy *Frankenstein Island*) to the stupendously souzy and shocking gross-out nasty sewer-slapping nadir of *The Toolbox Murders*.

**TED NEEDLEY** Following his funky turn as a groovy hippie messiah in the now hopelessly dated and ridiculous musical Jesus Christ, Superstar Needley tackled a co-starring part in the outstanding horror Western *The Shadow of Chikara*.

**ROBERT POWELL** After playing Christ in the epic all-star TV miniseries *Jesus of Nazareth*, Powell went on to act in a handful of horror films. (Donald Pleasance appears in *Jesus of Nazareth* as one of the three wise men.) Powell starred out with starring turns in both *Harlequin* and *The Survivor*, essaying a Rasputin-like faith healer in



the former and the arrestful spirit of a pilot killed in an airplane crash in the latter. Powell had a co-starring part in a made-for-TV version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and was a superb Victor Frankenstein in the '84 telepic *Frankenstein*, thus becoming the only actor to go from playing the Son of God to portraying a driven scientist with delusions of being God. Powell also was the scruffy soldier of fortune hero in the entertaining subterranean creature feature *What Blatts Below*.

**CHRIS SARANDON** Toplined as you-knew-who in the '79 made-for-TV movie *The Day Christ Died*. Like Robert Powell has amassed a considerable amount of horror films on his oeuvre. These films include a suave bisexual vampire in the marvelous *Fright Night*, the really cool killer doll flick *Child's Play*, the solid H.P. Lovecraft adaptation *The Resurrected*, a corrupt, money-grubbing like TV evangelist in tales from the *Crypt Presents Rodello of Blood*, and the nifty direct-to-video pic *Tempress*.

**JEREMY SISTO** After doing the titular role as our savior in the recent TV miniseries *Jesus Suto* went on to portray a doomed young guy who gets brutally bagged by a trio of vicious forest-dwelling in-bred hillbilly cannibal mutants in the kick-ass backwoods fearfest *Wrong Turn* and the nervous boyfriend of a demented weirdo stalker loner chick in the profoundly unnerving (and oddly affecting) distaff psycho stunner *May*.

**DONALD SUTHERLAND** Made sporadic appearances as Christ in several dream sequences

in the downbeat anti-war film *Johnny Got His Gun*. Horror film roles include the splendidly eerie supernatural mystery thriller *Don't Look Now*, the fine '78 *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* remake, a possibly bogus charlatan faith healer in *Apprentice to Murder*, the weary mentor for the titular dragon cheerleader character in the original flop '92 feature *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the sturdy Robert A. Heinlein adaptation *The Puppetmasters*, and the deeply disturbing made-for-cable TV serial killer winner *Citizen X*. More recently Sutherland co-starred in ill-advised made-for-TV adaptations of *Frankenstein* and Stephen King's *Salem's Lot*.

**MARX VON SYDOW** Was a sensational Christ in the magnificent all-star big budget biblical epic *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, which the ubiquitous Donald Pleasance also acts in as Satan himself. Played Father Merrin in both the bonafide horror classic *The Exorcist* and its laughably lousy dad sequel *Exorcist II: The Heretic*, plus had the lead in Ingmar Bergman's hallucinatory Gothic creepathon *Hour of the Wolf*. Stole the show as a delightfully devout and diabolical devil in the strictly so-so Stephen King adaptation *Neverending Story* and had a bit part as a helpful shrink in *Citizen X*, appearing alongside former fellow Christ thesp Donald Sutherland in the latter.

**CRAIG WASSON** Prior to acting in movies got a chance to literally assume center stage as a getdown cool'n'hip singing and dancing incarnation of God's only son in a theatrical production of *Godspell*. Wasson's flighty film credits include the undeservedly maligned adaptation of Peter Straub's *Ghost Story*, Brian De Palma's superbly sleazy murder mystery thriller *Body Double*, and the superior sequel *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*. ■

Bela Lugosi is Christ in 1916's *The Passion*



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# CONFESIONS OF A MONSTER BOOMER

BY FRANK J. DELLO STRITTO

## The Cinema of Pontius Pilate

My editor has asked me to divert from my usual preoccupation with monsters to one of the many controversies stirred by Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. Repeatedly cited in discussions of the movie is Gibson's sympathetic depiction of Pontius Pilate (played by Hristo Shopov), who sentenced Christ to crucifixion. Repeatedly cited in commentaries on the film is the rather sympathetic depiction of what most scholars agree was a typically brutal Roman governor. Overlooked by the academicians are Pilate's earlier screen incarnations, which span a wide range of characters but are often just as sympathetic as Shopov. But not always: from Richard Boone's curt cop (in 1953's *The Robe*) to Herd Hatfield's decadent aristocrat (in 1961's *King of Kings*) to Rod Steiger's stressed-out bureaucrat (in 1977's *Jesus of Nazareth*) to Gary Oldham's Machiavellian schemer (in 2000's *Jesus*), the Roman governor of Judea has worn many faces in the movies.

Pilate usually appears only briefly in film versions of Christ's life, but it is the type of role that character actors relish. For all but the most provocative films, Christ must be portrayed within narrow confines, and the surprise performances naturally shift to those playing the colorful figures that surround him: Mary Magdalene, John the Baptist, Caiaphas, Herod, Judas, Barabbas and even Satan. The prevailing interpretation of Pilate is as a pawn of cosmic forces whose damnation or salvation is to glimpse the infinite and know the truth of Christ's words: "thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above" (John 19:11).

Christ, and therefore Pilate, appear rarely in the early decades of cinema.

Portrayals of Christ on screen were banned in some countries, including Britain, until the 1950s. Before 1960 the story of Christ had the full Hollywood treatment only once, in DeMille's 1927 silent classic, *King of Kings*. Victor Varconi's Pilate is almost dwarfed by the trappings that surround him. When first seen, he sits unhappily on his throne beneath giant imperial eagle, somehow aware of what he will be forced to do. Pilate's scenes in the film mirror his appearance in the Bible: first judging Christ and then pleading with the mob to release his captive before literally washing

*The Robe* and *Salome* (played by Basil Sydney). The great era of Biblical epics came in the wake of the box-office success in the late 1950s of *The Ten Commandments* and *Ben Hur*. Filmmakers scoured to churn out stories from the Bible, and produced as many Pilates in the next five years as had been offered in the previous 40. Some of the Pilates are in straight tellings Christ's life, such as Telly Savalas in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. Some of the films, like *Pontius Pilate* (played by Jean Marais) and *Barabbas* (Pilate played by Arthur Kennedy, with Anthony Quinn in the title role) invent a life for Pilate outside of the Biblical account.

The 1961 *King of Kings* does both, and greatly expands Pilate's role in the story. Scripture is none too closely followed in the movie, which opens with the Romans destroying the ark of the Covenant (which actually vanished centuries before they arrived in Judea). In the strange world of



Pilate (Hristo Shopov), center, in Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*.

his hands of the episode. Throughout he is anguished but not uncertain: he reluctantly plays his part in the Passion and disappears.

For more than 30 years thereafter, films set in New Testament times told the story not of Christ but of someone affected by him. Pilate appears fleetingly in a few of these. Basil Rathbone in 1935's *The Last Days of Pompeii* is first seen as a supremely self-confident official, then many years later as a patrician haunted by his role in the Passion. Pilate appears twice in 1953, in

*King of Kings*. Pilate (Herd Hatfield) is elevated to son-in-law of Emperor Tiberius, and sees his posting in Judea as a stepping stone to greater things. "If you can rule Judea," his well-connected wife tells him, "you can rule anywhere, even Rome." Obviously, this Pilate will brook no rebellion. Accordingly and contrary to the Bible, he has a hand in Herod's arrest of John the Baptist, but his main worry is Barabbas, promoted in this movie to rebel leader. Despite Pilate's greater presence, the movie

denies him his great moment, that of offering to release Christ. Inexplicably, the whole sequence of the mob crying "give us Barabbas" occurs offscreen.

What marks all the 1960s epics, good and bad, is piety. In the 1970s piety yielded to irreverence. *Jesus Christ Superstar* lead the way. Andrew Lloyd Webber's first theatrical sensation brought earthy music to the tale of Christ, but it was most controversial in its earthy plot elements: the disciples are yes-men; Judas the only worthy man among them and arguably the story's hero; Mary Magdalene may be Christ's lover. This most sympathetic of Pilates (played by Barry Dennen in the 1973 film version) is tortured by nightmares, happily turns over his unwanted prison to Herod. He literally begs the mob to release Christ, but foresees in his dream that he will be blamed for his death:

"Then I saw thousands of millions/Crying for this man/I heard them mentioning my name/As if I were to blame."

In 1976 came the most outrageous of the Christ Films to date, *The Passover Plot*, based on a popular novel in which the crucifixion and resurrection are a ruse staged by Christ. Donald Pleasance is fine as Pilate, but the best remembered Pilate of the 1970s appeared in a return-to-piety film. Franco Zeffirelli's televised *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) boasts an all-star cast and a six-hour running time, but Rod Steiger's few scenes as Pilate almost steal the show. "I'm tired," are Steiger's first words. And irritable and impatient with his aides, his servants and the Judean elders asking his help in dealing with Jesus. They consistently underestimate him, and he must remand the priests that his Greek is as good as theirs ("Christ" is from the Greek for "anointed"). This Pilate has no desire to become involved in what he sees as an internal dispute among the Jews. For all his shrewdness, he at first cannot grasp why the elders are so threatened by Jesus. But when he sees Christ, flogged, bleeding and bathed in sunlight, something awakens in him. He plays his part—not against his will but independent from it. He is almost a spectator at his own performance in the Passion. Pilate offers to release Jesus, and as always gives the crowd Barabbas, and exists not sure of what he did or why.

*Jesus of Nazareth* was the first television mini-series based on the life of Christ. More would eventually follow; but after *The Day Christ Died* in 1979 (Pilate played

by Keith Mitchell) came a long drought in films about Jesus. With one notable exception, nothing of importance appeared in the 1980s and 1990s. *The Last Temptation of Christ* was as controversial in its day (1988), as *The Passion of the Christ* is today. Martin Scorsese's film stages at the outset that it does not follow the Gospels, and gives an alternative version of Christ's life that many found literally blasphemous. David Bowie's cool detachment makes Pilate, though only briefly seen, again one of the most memorable characters. Jesus is brought to him in a cavernous corridor. Before turning to Christ, Pilate pats his horse and has a soldier lead it away, while

Bowie's Pilate is nothing short of eerie, almost ghostly as he calmly sends Christ to the most horrific of deaths. His only human emotion is weariness at the constant uprisings he must suppress: "killing or loving, it's all the same—it simply doesn't matter how you want to change things—we don't want them changed."

New millennia bring upswings in religious fervor. Mel Gibson's film is by far the most prominent but hardly the only recent sighting of Christ. Among them are a televised revival of *Jesus Christ Superstar* with Fred Johanson as the most violently tormented Pilate yet, and *Jesus & Judas* in 2003, with Tim Matheson as a torn but preppy Pilate. The 2000 Jesus portrays Jesus as an all-American boy, who, when not preaching and healing, is horsing around with his buddies. Pitted against him is Gary Oldham's Pilate, no longer a pawn but the prime mover in Christ's arrest and execution. In this film, the Judean elders are the anguished ones, who see Christ's elimination as a necessary concession to Rome. Pilate exits with no hint of remorse, proud of his complex manipulation of Herod and Caiaphas.

This brief overview deals entirely films commercially released to theatres and television. Unmentioned is a possibly enormous body of films produced by churches and religious organizations for private screenings. How various Christian denominations portray the Passion might reveal a few different twists to Pilate. If Gibson's film is any insight into this arcane body of work, some surprises might indeed be in store. ■



Pilate (Rod Steiger) questions Christ in Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*

another soldier guards the captive. The imagery is clear: he holds Christ and probably all the Judeans in no greater regard than his horse. It is certainly clear to Jesus, who—when asked to perform some magic—protests that he is not a trained animal.

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# THE CAVES THAT COULDN'T DIE!

by Jan Alan Henderson

## A Troglodyte's Adventures in Bronson Caves and Brush Canyon

**B**ody-snatching pods used to hang out in them! Serial Superman Kirk Alyn's arch enemy The Spider Lady took up residence in them. There have been missions that required an SOS Coast Guard signal. IT tried to conquer the world from them. Killers from Space brainwashed Peter Graves in them. Adams West's Batman called them home! The loneliest Texas Ranger was bushwhacked in them! More than one Lost Horizon has been seen from them! Flash Gordon battled the great god of Tao on the Planet Mongo, and Charles (Ming, the Merciless) Middleton died in this Hollywood hot spot in 1936.

Probably the most photographed pile of rocks on the entire planet, they stand stoically silent.

Nestled high in the Hollywood Hills, below the legendary Hollywood sign, is an indestructible landmark, Bronson Caves. Originally known as Brush Canyon, located in southern Griffith Park, it was developed by the Union Rock Company in 1907, as the Union

Brick Quarry. The granite was first removed by truck, but the neighbors objected to the truck traffic, and a rail line was installed. This line ran through the main chamber of the cave to the street below, and ran during restricted hours in the morning and evening. The main cave and its two tributaries were drilled through the mountain to expedite the removal of granite from the back portion of the quarry.

The first cinematic appearance of the caves was the National Pictures serial *Lightning Bryce*, starring Jack Hoxie and Ann Little. Made in 1919, this Western adventure was directed by Paul C. Hurst, who also costarred as the villain, "Powder Solveng." It is open to speculation whether the method of ore removal (truck vs. rail) is the reason for the first appearance of the quarry in this early film. It is possible that Union Rock rented the facility to National Pictures during its conversion from rail to truck in 1918, as a means of supplementing their income during the quarry downtime. The rail tracks and trains in the quarry itself remained, and are evident in the serial

Taking place in the 1919 Old West, *Lightning Bryce* could almost be classified as a horror Western. It features an ethereal mystery woman, Indians with sacred gold and crystal balls, and a visit to the Los Angeles Chinatown district, to an opium den run by Dopey Sam. Mixed in with primitive auto chases and western locales is Bronson Caves, as the stone quarry and canyon where the action in Chapters 8 to 10 takes place. Union Rock Company's equipment, outbuildings, scaffolding and conveyor belts are a major part of this serial scenery.

There are chases and captures, which result in the capture of a sinister Indian played by Steve Clement (a full blooded Yaqui Indian, also known as Esteban Clemente or Steve Clemente), who constantly tries to rob Lightning of the sacred gold nuggets. Clement, who was killed as the world's greatest knife thrower in Vaudeville, played a unique part in the formulation of the scenario for the classic jungle thriller, *Kong Kong*, in which he played the witch doctor.

Clement had an experience in real life close to that of the fictional Carl Denham, while looking for an assistant for his knife throwing act. Playing the character role of Zaroff's Mongolian servant in *The Most Dangerous Game*, he related this tale to screenwriter Ruth Rose, of a scruffily dressed young maiden in a lunchroom, and an agent who refused to supply Clement with girls for his act. Steve Clement was also shot in the face by one Scarlet O'Hara (Vivien Leigh) in the classic Civil War drama, *Gone With The Wind*.

One of the cliffhangers involves the heroine and the Indian being hung from the top of Brush Canyon, only to be saved by Lightning Bryce. Bryce quickly dynamites the canyon, which is captured explosively by cinematographer Herbert Glendon.

Glendon gives the viewer a panoramic view of Brush Canyon through a series of long shots, filmed on the highest Eastern ridge of the canyon. There are magnificent silhouette shots of the principal players exploring the caves, with cave dust and smoke adding an eerie dimension to this silent serial gem.

It is interesting to note that in 1919, there was a rock lodge above the cave openings at the rear of the canyon. This ridge was approximately 10 feet wide, and looked as if it could hold three automobiles.

Operations ceased in the quarry in the late Twenties, and all the buildings, rail tracks and scaffolding were removed. The ledge above the tri-opening cave was chiseled off, and the caverns have remained as they are today.

By the early 1930s, Bronson Caves was a featured landscape in the new medium of Talkies. 1931 saw the caves play host to Nat Levine's Mascot serial unit, for the production of *King of the Wild*. This 'all talking' serial features a pre-Frankenstein Boris Karloff as the African sheik Mustapha. Involved with two cohorts in the murder of an Indian rajah, this serial features a letter written in invisible ink, a diamond field in a volcano, jungle animals, and a mysterious old man and woman. Photographed effectively by cinematographers Benjamin Kline and Edward J. Kull, this convoluted multi-genre serial is typical of what would be Nat Levine and Mascot's serial output of the early '30s.

Levine and Company next visited the caves at the end of 1931, for *The Lightning Warrior*, starring canine favorite Rin-Tin-Tin. Rin-Tin-Tin, then an elder statesdog, required a stunt double, and died in his master's arms shortly after the completion of this serial. Rinny had made silent films for Warner Brothers, which kept the studio afloat in the late 1920s. The dog was found on a French battlefield by trainer Lee Duncan.

A madman agitator known as the Wolfman (ten years before the Lon Chaney, Jr. classic) triggers an Indian uprising. When Jimmy Carter (played by Frankie Darro) is killed, the intrigue intensifies through twelve complex chapters. Rinny and his pals dodge peril at every turn.

Bronson Caves play a vital scenic role in *The Lightning Warrior*, as the Wolfman's lair. Cinematographer Ben Kline moved into the co-director's chair, which he shared with Armand Schaefer. The show was photographed by Ernest Miller and William Nobles (who later worked at Republic).

John Wayne, Glenn Strange, Charlie King and Eddie Parker fought their way through the caves in the railroad action serial *Hurricane Express* (Mascot 1932). *Hurricane Express* is the second of John Wayne's two of Mascot serials. The third and most popular of these chapter plays to showcase the rugged exterior of Bronson Caves is *The Three Musketeers* (Mascot 1933). This Foreign Legion thriller boasts a supporting cast of Jack Mulhall, Western favorite Raymond Hatton, Francis X. Bushman, Creighton Chaney (later changed to Lon,



Opposing page: For *Return of Dracula*, Francis Lederer rests on a stake in a studio mock-up of the bottom of one of the Bronson caves. No such pits exist in the real quarry. Note the studio light by Lederer's right leg. Above: A decomposed Francis Lederer finds the eternal light without the studio light.

Jr.), and Noah Berry, Jr. The Duke plays an American pilot named Tom Wayne, who rescues the Three Musketeers (Mulhall, Hatton, and Bushman) from a group of Arab terrorists. These bandits, known as the Devil's circle, threaten the legionnaires through twelve suspense packed episodes, photographed by Ernest Miller and Tom Gulligan. Released as a serial and a 90-min feature version, it was re-issued in 1948 as a 70-min feature entitled *Desert Command* by Favorite Films.

The fantasy film *Deluge* (Admiral Productions, Inc., 1933) spotlights the caves with dramatic photography by Norbert Brodine. Brodine (on loan from MGM) gives the audience a preview of the photographic possibilities of Bronson Canyon and Caves, to be realized in 1950s science fiction features - most notably, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

The star of *Deluge* is its breathtaking special effects. Often, but incorrectly, credited to Willis O'Brien, these effects were the work of Ned Mann and Russell Lawson (who constructed the miniatures), and Billy N. Williams, co-cinematographer. While *Deluge* remains largely unseen (Englewood Video did provide a limited VHS release), one can glimpse portions of the dynamic New York destruction sequence in Republic Productions' *Dick Tracy vs. Crime, Inc.* (1941), *S.O.S. Tidal Wave* (1938), and Republic's first 'Rocketman' serial, *King of the Rocketmen* (1949). It was replayed in the *Commando Cody: Sky Marshall of the Universe* episode entitled "Nightmare Typhoon."

Two examples of effective night photography in the caves are in *The Vampire Bat* (Majestic, 1933) and *The Monkey's Paw* (RKO 1933). *The Vampire Bat* is a lurid tale of vampirism through scientific means. With an all-star horror cast of Lionel Atwill, Fay Wray, Melvyn Douglas, and Dwight Frye, this crude yet atmospheric thriller was shot on the sets of the Frankenstein village and castle at



Above: Robert Vaughn with longbow in hand on the floor of Brush Canyon, from Roger Corman's *Teenage Caveman*, American International Pictures, 1958

Top: The Invisible Invaders descend from Brush Canyon into Bronson Caves, United Artists, 1958

Top right: The Killers from Space and all their equipment is no match for the budget or the plot, let alone Peter Graves, in RKO's *Killers from Space*, 1954

Universal. Dwight Frye, once again playing a lunatic, Herman Giese, whose nocturnal bat-keeping antics earn him the number one murder suspect moniker, is chased down by the torch welding vigilante villagers. They corner him in Bronson Caves, which becomes an interior set that does not resemble the exterior of the caves. It should be noted that fra Morgan's eerie photography of the exterior/interior of the cave adds greatly to the Universal Gothic feel of this Majestic feature.

Morgan had a long career at Columbia Pictures in the '40s in Sam Katzman's serial unit. *The Monkey's Paw* features stunning night-for-night photography by second unit cinematographer Jack Mackenzie. This night time battle sequence was filmed in one evening in the caves and canyon on October 19, 1932, and wrapped at 5:00 in the morning. Special effects man Harry Redmond detonated the charges, which kicked up the dust in the canyon, adding to the overall effect of the photography. The last charge of the battle was detonated directly in front of the camera.

In 1934 Bronson Canyon returns in Western serials. Mascot Pictures' production of *Mystery Mountain* starring Ken Maynard and his wonder horse Tarzan, made dual usage of the canyon and caves. A railroad camp occupied one end of the quarry, while the other end was the villain's hideout. *Mystery Mountain* was photographed by Mascot regulars Ernest Miller and William Nobles.

Miller and Nobles also photographed the caves and canyon for Gene Autry's Western/sci-fi/musical/fantasy/serial, *The Phantom Empire* (Mascot 1935). This show features the futuristic city of Murana melting via Jack Coyle and Howard Lydecker's stereopticon plates. This effect utilized a 4x5 stereopticon plate with soft emulsion, heated from underneath. *Phantom Empire* offers an ample helping of Gene Autry music, the company of Frankie Duro and the Radio Ranch Regulars, and "Smiley" Burnett's hilarious harmonica solos. The art direction and photography involving the canyon and caves are spectacular.

Soldiers riding through the canyon are photographed in much the same style as the exterior of Red Rock Canyon was, for the Universal Pictures' *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars*, and Buck Rogers serials. With an *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*-style trap door installed on the buck mtn tunnel, and stunning floor to ceiling laboratory equipment inside the caverns, *Phantom Empire's* science fiction/musical/Western elements make this a unique serial jewel.

*Condemned To Live* (Invincible Pictures, 1935) is another tale dealing with vampirism which utilizes the caves and cliffs of Bronson Canyon. By intercutting ocean shots with those of the rock strata of Bronson Canyon, the audience is led to believe that the caves and canyon are part of this European shoreline. *Condemned To Live* was filmed on Universal's backlot, as was *Vampire Bat* (with *Bride of Frankenstein* having just completed production). *Condemned To Live* also used the bell tower set of Lon Chaney, Sr.'s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Universal 1923), with Ted Billings in his Tyrolean costume from *The*

*Bride of Frankenstein* as the bell-ringer.

Comic adventure strips were the rage in the '30s. The Sunday and daily appearances of these cartoon features were a sure sell at the box office. *Flash Gordon* premiered on Sunday, January 7, 1934, in Hearst newspapers throughout the country. Distributed by King Features, *Flash Gordon* was created by Alex Raymond, a former Wall Street brokerage-clerk turned cartoonist. Raymond simultaneously created *Jungle Jim* to serve as an introduction piece to the new science-fiction cartoon. *Flash* and *Jim* were created as competition for early favorites *Buck Rogers* (created in 1929) and *Tarzan* (created in 1912 by Edgar Rice Burroughs). In an ironic twist of fate, Johnny Weismuller, who originated the role of *Tarzan* in the Talkies in 1931 for MGM, ended up playing *Jungle Jim* for 'Jungle Sam' Katzman and Columbia's "B" picture unit.

The *Jungle Jim* feature *Mark of the Gorilla* and several other features make use of Bronson Canyon. Two years after Alex Raymond's *Jungle Jim* and *Flash Gordon* successes, Universal attained the rights to Raymond's strip. The serial, a highly successful medium in the '30s, would be the format for the interplanetary adventures of *Flash Gordon*. A radio show of *Flash Gordon* had been a success, running simultaneously with the comic strips. One of the reasons for *Flash Gordon's* success was a highly sex-charged story line.

The interior tunnels of Bronson Caves are among some of the most striking backgrounds for *Flash's* battle with two of mighty Mongo's greatest beasts. The Gocco was the first of these Herculean terrors to be encountered by *Flash*. Played by Glenn Strange, this monster was aided by wire riggings hooked into the ceiling of the caverns. The suit was reconstructed for the *Fire Dragon* in later chapters. The Caves also provided the scenery for the climactic ending of *Flash Gordon*, where Ming the Merciless enters the Sacred Temple of the god Tao. A false perspective was utilized in the tunnel to make the Gocco appear larger than *Flash* in these battle sequences. A carefully disguised small person stood in for Buster Crabbe as *Flash* to make these scenes seem larger than life.

Ming's soldiers traveled through the caves in often repeated footage throughout the thirteen interplanetary episodes of *Flash Gordon*. The success of *Flash Gordon* prompted two equally successful serials, *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars* (Universal 1938, presented in green tints, as were the reissues of *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and *The Old Dark House*) and *Flash Gordon Conquers The Universe* (Universal 1940). The success of *Flash Gordon* led Republic Pictures to the comic strips. They purchased the rights to the *Dick Tracy* strip for \$10,000. Hiring unknown bit player Ralph Byrd at \$150 per week to play Chester Ghoul's protagonist, Republic was off and running in

the serial sweepstakes of popular comic heroes.

With the box office popularity of *Dick Tracy*, Republic cast Byrd opposite Bela Lugosi in *S.O.S. Coast Guard* (Republic 1937). This well-mounted episodic Coast Guard adventure featured effects by Jack Coyle, Howard Lydecker, and the new West Coast transplant, Theodore Lydecker. Most rewarding of these effects is the stereopticon plate gag, recreated with the rock walls of Brush Canyon.

Bela Lugosi's character Borroff has developed a gas that will quite literally melt anything on contact. With his mute assistant, played by serial veteran Richard Alexander, (Prince Barin from the first two *Flash Gordon* serials), Lugosi wreaks havoc on all who dare defy his new world order. In the serial's climactic sequences, Ralph Byrd and troops deal with Lugosi's monstrous mystery gas and save the day with only a small part of Bronson Canyon and Caves being melted in the process.

Columbia Pictures and Peter Lorre paid a visit to Brush Canyon in the seldom seen *Island of Doomed Men* (Columbia 1940). Lorre plays a sadist named Steven Denel. Denel would arrange for parole for an inmate, then have him shipped off to Dead Man's Island to work his secret diamond mine (Bronson Canyon). Cameraman Ben Kline's moody photography adds to the bleak desperation of this picture. Lorre leers at his wife (played by the sexy Rochell Hudson), and gleefully flogs the hero (Robert Wilcox) by lantern light in the Canyon.

By 1940 Columbia and Republic Pictures had their own in-studio caves (exteriors and interiors). Both studios continued to use the Canyon exterior as well as the Caves interiors and exteriors.

In Chapter 5 of *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*, Republic revisits the Canyon and repeats the stereopticon plate melting effect of the entrance to the main tunnel. The Scorpion and his henchmen lure Captain Marvel to the back of the Cave by using a dummy of the Scorpion rigged with a loudspeaker. Marvel discovers the wire and follows it to his mannequin foe, only to find that the walls of the cave are rapidly melting around him. The Scorpion has aimed the Sacred Golden Scorpion (which is a powerful weapon with the potential of turning ordinary rock into gold) at the opening of Bronson Cave, turning the opening into molten liquid. With waves of lava about to consume him, Marvel spies a hole in the cave ceiling and springs through it, avoiding the molten destruction.

Cinematographer William Nobles and directors William Whitney and John English mix interiors of the in-studio cave and exteriors of Bronson Caves for a highly imaginative result. In one sequence, when the Scorpion is describing his devilish plans to his henchmen,

the lighting and photography seem to give the interior studio caves an eerie golden glow. The stereopticon plate effects are again handled masterfully by Howard and Theodore Lydecker, and this effect is repeated in countless Republic serials, most notably *King of the Rocketmen* and *Radar Men to the Moon*. Shot in a mere 39 days, and released to standing room only crowds in March of 1941, *Captain Marvel* is classic serial fantasy. It may be the best sound serial ever produced!

This chapter play might well have been *The Adventures of Superman*. In 1940 Republic had optioned the Superman story and character, but due to legal complications with D.C. Comics, Republic ceased negotiations with D.C. and turned to Fawcett Comics, which owned *Captain Marvel*, *Spy Smasher*, and *Captain America*. Eight years later, Sam Katzman and Columbia's serial unit brought Superman to the screen in 15 chapters of glowing sepia-tones.

While heavily relying on their in-studio caverns, the first Superman serial uses front and back cave entrances of Bronson Caves. The entrance to the Spider Lady's hideout is the front single tunnel of the Cave (in 1966, this opening served as the entrance to the bat cave in 20th Century Fox's popular *Batman* television program, starring Adam West and Burt Ward), while the back trio of tunnels serve as the backdrop for a mining disaster in Chapter 2, entitled "Depth of the Earth." For the interior of the mine, Columbia used their studio cave interior. While cinematographer Ira H. Morgan's low-angle photography enhances Bronson Caves as a mine front, there is little his photography can do to save the cheapness of the interior cave sets.

The late 1940s saw a declining movie industry, the emergence of television, and more location shooting for Bronson Caves.

The Lone Ranger had long been a popular character on radio, and its transference to the T.V. screen surprised no one. With veteran Republic player Clayton Moore assuming the title role of The Lone Ranger, and Jay Silverheels as his faithful sidekick, Tonto, this program was an instant success. Bronson Caves and Canyons provided most of the exterior scenery for the first three episodes, which were entitled *The Legend of the Lone Ranger*. Butch Cavendish, played by the veteran Western/horse actor Glenn Strange, ambushed a group of Texas Rangers in Brush Canyon. After the ambush, Tonto, the Lone Ranger's faithful companion, finds him wounded and urges him back to health in Bronson Caves.

Bronson Caverns, Canyon and surrounding area played an indispensable part of the '50s science fiction film craze. One of the early visitors to the cave was *Robot Monster* (Astor Pictures, 1953). This barely watchable, no-budget feature sports a monster which is basically a man in a gorilla suit with a space helmet

on, and a bad case of fleas, gyrating around the back entrance of the cave, with feathers blowing madly throughout sequences of long spaced-out embellishments from this furry alien.

Low-budget monsters slithered in and out of Bronson Caves throughout the '50s. Some memorable — or unmemorable, depending on the viewer's perspective — monsters the caves were invaded by were the *Killers From Space*, *Teenage Caveman*, *The Cosmic Man*, *The Brain From Planet Arous*, *She Demons*, *Invisible Invaders*, and *The Return of Dracula*.

Of these troglodytes from other worlds, and demons from the center of our own world, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1956) photographically captures the majesty of Bronson Caves more than any other picture that featured the caves. The plot is simple '50s paranoid fare. The hero and heroine are confronted by their hometown friends and family who cultivate pods from another world. These pods are placed next to the sleeping townsfolk, and produce an exact replica of that person. Once the soul integrates with this alien horticulture, the zombie-like subject becomes free of all material strife, and is in a state of blissful euphoria produced from their new-found plantlike immortality. Fleeing the townsfolk, the two heroes, Miles Bennell — aptly played by Kevin McCarthy — and his former sweetheart

Becky Driscoll — sensually played by Dana Wynter — take refuge in a mine shaft (Bronson Caves), complete with a secret crawl space specially dug into the cave floor, covered over with a board walkway. The two struggle to stay awake, after being awake for several days. They hide beneath the false cave floor as the townspeople thunder over them.

The photography of Ellsworth Fredericks, A.S.C., makes this entire series of scenes horrific. Especially effective is the low angle photography of the two protagonists, soaking wet, trying to keep still as the townsfolk run across the planks merely inches above their heads. After the townsfolk have gone, hearing music the hero goes to check out the Canyon, and the heroine falls asleep. When he returns, he is unaware that she has slipped into slumber and has been possessed. Frederick's intense camera work conveys Kevin McCarthy's reaction of terror, as sweat and mud-soaked schizophrenia, as McCarthy rants and raves to his heroine Wynter, who has been taken over by her pod double.

Fredericks' camera conveys, through a series of low-angle shots, the paranoia of a love lost in a matter of minutes. McCarthy's character runs hysterically into the midst of a traffic jam. He approaches one truck, pulling the canvas hacking off the trailer, finding it loaded full of pods, and shortly finds himself in the psy-

chotic ward. Ellsworth Fredericks' photography of the caves and this entire low budget thriller is stunning.

*The Return of Dracula* is another '50s B horror/thriller set in Brush Canyon. In this Gramercy Pictures effort, the caves play a main part in establishing the atmosphere of this low-budget venture. This descendant of Dracula, expertly played by Francis Lederer, after disembarking from a local train, transplants his coffin deep in the Canyon, in the bowels of Bronson Caves. With many fog-laden coffin openings, this budget filmed saga of Dracula featured a pulse-pounding musical score by composer Gerald Fried.

The amount of Westerns made in Bronson Caves would be incalculable, let alone the amount of television shows. The location is more often booked than not. It served as the backdrop for the conclusion of the John Wayne classic *The Searchers*, and was used extensively in the Western T.V. favorites *Bonanza* and *Gunsmoke*. The pilot for *The Adventure of Superboy* was shot in the canyon by Superman T.V. producer Whitney Ellsworth.

With its 90-plus year history, it is highly unlikely that Bronson Caves will be torn down to accommodate a mini-mall. In our ever-changing world, it's nice to know something of Hollywood history will remain until the end of time. ■

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# THE VIKING QUEEN

1967, dir. Don Chaffey (Seven Arts-Hammer, starring Carita, Don Murray, Andrew Keir, Niall MacGinnis)

**T**he year is 61 A.D., the place is Britain during the Roman occupation.

Because of her mild demeanor and compromising nature, Salina (Carita) is chosen by her dying father to succeed him to the throne of the Iceni tribe. Despite her efforts to keep a peaceful co-existence with the Romans, and her impassioned love for their governor, Justinian (Don Murray), conflict is inevitable and the uneasy balance is soon disrupted.

While Justinian is away, Salina falls into the hands of Octavian (Keir), the Roman second-in-command who believes that Roman rule should be more harshly enforced. Assuming full powers, he has Salina stripped to the waist and bound to an upended ox cart, where she is flogged and humiliated before her assembled people. Then Octavian forces himself on her younger sister.

The outrage finally breaks down Salina's resolve. At the reins of a knife-bubbled chariot, she leads her people into battle, all the while knowing that the fateful moment will come when she will have to take arms against Justinian, the man she loves. The rather abrupt and woeful end to their love affair is an all-too melancholy reminder that love, as well as life, is brief and fragile.

In fact, the final scene underscores the thread of fatalism that runs consistently throughout the film. As the characters rush headlong towards their collective destinies, they are always having their personal desires and motivations subjugated by the historical and political context in which they live. It matters little that Salina loves Justinian; her duty is to her people. So, as their queen, she is obligated to put aside what she wants for what she MUST do. Justinian has sworn allegiance to the Empire, so he also forgoes what he wants.

The cast of *The Viking Queen* is

headed by Carita, a leggy lass from Finland making her motion picture debut. (Did Carita appear in anything subsequent? I don't think so. Believe me, I checked.) Reciting her lines phonetically, she emotes about as much as Stonehenge. But her model good looks, long tresses, and low-cut gowns tend to overshadow most of her shortcomings.

The Roman governor, Justinian, is played by Don Murray, best known as Michelle Lee's better half on the early '80s TV show *Knot's Landing*. He turns in a serviceable showing, especially when matched opposite to his lovely yet vapid co-star.

The remainder of the cast is held together nicely by the usual cast of British stalwarts: Andrew Keir, Niall MacGinnis, and Adrienne Corri. Any moderate fan of British cinema will recognize these names, and it is really their enduring reliability that makes this costume drama more of the silk purse rather than the proverbial sow's ear it could have easily been.

Although the Vikings wouldn't have invaded English shores for yet another 700 years, the plot of *The Viking Queen* is a case of art imitating life. Producer John Temple-Smith's story is loosely based on the real-life experiences of Queen Boudicca of ancient Britain. In 61 A.D., with the blessing of the Druids, she, like Salina, ignited a rebellion against the Romans, only to have it end in a calamitous battle in which 80,000 Britons perished. After undergoing certain indignities, including the raping of her daughters, Boudicca took her own life, thus denying the vindictive Romans their pound of flesh. Now a folk hero in England, she is honored by Londoners with a huge statue at Hyde Park corner, near the Houses of Parliament.

Veteran director Don Chaffey (*One Million Years B.C.*, *Creatures the World Forgot*, and "Dynamation" favorite *Jason and the Argonauts*) lends his steady hand to the proceedings. Even though the film was shot entirely in

Ireland, he manages very well to capture the essence of "Dark Island," as 1st Century Britain was often called. It seems to be a rigueur for many filmmakers to deliberately disrupt their projects with swirling camera movements and eerie lighting. They get in the way of the story. Chaffey, on the other hand, has a very strong story here, and he has enough artistic sense to step aside and let the tale do the telling. The adage "less is more" has an alluring appeal.

Above all, this film is Hammer, with all the customary Hammer trappings: breast-plated beauties, star-crossed lovers, romance, whippings, chariot races, and an occasional Druid sacrifice in which a cage of unfortunates is lowered into a fiery pit of death - all this propped up against the backdrop of history.

If you like your swords and sandals, you can give *The Viking Queen* an "E" for effort AND entertainment.

Reviewed by Rick Stonis



**A**t the end of World War II, it seemed the nation was singing "Happy Days Are Here Again" while the forces of evil on both sides were massing for a secret attack! The security that our soldiers fought and died for has always been fleeting at best (no fault of these gallant men and women who gave their lives). But as the late '40s and early '50s prove, we as a civilization split more than the atom.

The "P" word (paranoia) silently dominated the American psyche. Suddenly there were communists, leftover Nazis, bug-eyed monsters from space, and atomic war

animates his body to carry out his dastardly deeds, as a vanguard for an invasion from planet Mars.

Republic had the forethought to stage this kiddy paranoia the same year World War II ended. Was this merely a coincidence? Or had the atomic age really begun quite innocently at Saturday matinees (an quite brutally on the world stage)?

A fun serial for people who haven't seen it, with Linda Sterling and Dennis Moore in support of Barcroft and the animated corpse of

James Craven. *Out of print*, Republic Video

**THE MONSTER AND THE APE**  
*Columbia, 1945, 15 chapters*

Enemy agents out to steal a super robot powered by an element called "metalogen"

must have ter-  
rified post-war

preschoolers, but this wouldn't draw flatulence in contemporary times. While this has better production values and superior photography from most of the Columbia serials, the premise is flimsy, and probably didn't

so popular is anybody's guess. Maybe it was a case of Holmes asking Watson for the needle.

A better than average mid-40s Republic serial, with all the thrills one would expect from Hollywood's most accomplished thrill factory. While soft on the foreign terrorist angle, the domestic fiddle is well played, with shadowy figures with microphones dispensing orders from remote hideouts. Henchmen, high jinx, and special effects are the focus of this serial. The post-war paranoia is almost a given, which makes this show less than terrifying. The usual serial format is employed (a group of contemporaries is plagued by a saboteur in their midst). Still, jam-packed with action, and definitely worth a look. *Out of print*, on Republic Home Video.

### **BRICK BRADFORD**

*Columbia, 1947, 15 chapters*

The U.N. hires Brick Bradford (traveler of space and time) to thwart an evil genius from swiping an anti-missile device, in this typical Sam Katzman serial. Bradford,

# ATOMIC TERRORISTS...

...OR, MONSTERS OF THE ID AND BEYOND?

monsters rampaging across cinema screens. Here are a few examples of atomic terror and other fallout in the late '40s to the not-so-nifty '50s. The parallels between today's headlines and those of yesterday prove nothing has changed.

### **THE PURPLE MONSTER STRIKES** *Republic, 1945, 15 chapters*

Leave it to Republic Pictures to stage one of the first low-budget (yet highly effective due to the Lydecker Brothers' special effects) "invasion from another planet" flick. Veteran Western and serial actor Roy Barcroft plays the chief alien, who upon landing on planet Earth, kills one of America's leading scientists, and

hold water in 1945. The best thing in the serial is Ray "Crash" Corrigan's ape portrayal, and all the mad lab equipment. Robert Lowery, George MacReady, Ralph Morgan, Carole Mathews, and Jack Ingram fare better than the script, and the pace is moderate, not anywhere near the pulse-pounding Republic serials of the day. In the end, the terrorists either watching or in this show fell asleep in the third episode. *No video availability*

### **THE CRIMSON GHOST** *Republic, 1946, 12 chapters*

The Cyclotrode, an anti-nuclear device, is at the center of this Republic chapter play. A highly entertaining, atmospheric romp, with a guy in a bitchin' ghost (Crimson, that is) costume, that resembles a 1970s Don Post mask.

Why the stills of *The Crimson Ghost* shooting up a hapless Kenne Duncan were

officially known as "The Amazing Soldier of Fortune," transports himself to the moon and the 18th century, throughout the not-so-steady course of 15 chapters.

The question is, did the United Nations get their money's worth in the last reel? Probably not! Especially when time and space are being manipulated by Sam Katzman. Serial star Kane Richmond does an admirable job keeping a straight face. *No video on commercial video*.

### **JACK ARMSTRONG, THE ALL-AMERICAN BOY** *Columbia, 1947, 15 chapters*

Another offering from Sam Katzman's serial universe, but a marked step up in story and content. John Hart plays America's favorite high schooler, who gets tangled up with a mad scientist, his ray gun, and cartoon space ship. No one then or now is going to believe John Hart was anywhere near high school age when this was made, but to Hart's credit, his performance is thoroughly convincing



(despite Katzman's cheapo production values).

Wallace Fox, who directed *The Corpse Vanishes* five years prior, is at the helm for this 15 chapters of mayhem.

Charlie (Ming the Merciless) Middleton has an unblushing (a clerical error) villainous role in this show, and walks away with it. Ming without makeup! Available on V.C.I. Home Video on cassette, and waiting for DVD release.

**BRUCE GENTRY – DAREDEVIL OF THE SKIES**  
Columbia, 1948, 15 chapters

This third flying soldier of fortune serial is one of the better Katzman efforts. Centered around a plot to destroy the Panama Canal, Tom Neal is in top form, equaling his performance in Republic's cliffhanger classic *Jungle Girl* (Republic 1941). Directed by the team who brought



must outweigh the physical ability of the mortal man.

Jeff King, aptly played by veteran character man

this hearkens to the attacks on the Japanese subways in the 1990s. *No video availability.*

#### KING OF THE ROCKET MEN

*Republic, 1949, 12 chapters.*

It's a sure bet that most everyone can identify with Old Bullethead. The great-grandfather of *The Rocketeer* was created in this 12-chapter science mystery that once again entertained Saturday matinee audiences. Set in the middle of post war paranoia, *King of the Rocket Men* provides a hero who needs the rocket suit for his heroics. In some ways like the Batman character, the science

## CULT CREEPS: PART TWO

Superman to life on the serial screen (Spencer Bennet and Thomas Carr), and featuring animated flying saucers which were re-used in Katzman's *Atom Man vs. Superman* (Columbia 1950), this is one of the more realistic of the Columbia serials. *No video availability.*

**DICK BARTON – SPECIAL AGENT**  
*Hammer, 1948*

An early offering from the budding Hammer films. This picture lends no insight to the great heights that Hammer would gain in the late 50s to the mid-60s, and comes nowhere near the late 50s science fiction films such as *The Creeping Unknown* (*Quatermass I*), *Enemy from Space* (*Quatermass II*), let alone their Gothic color series of classic Universal remakes.

Routine at best, it's connection to terrorism, old and new, is germ warfare, aka bio-terrorist attacks. Unseen germs are more terrifying today than yesterday, but

Tristram Coffin, battles with the mysterious Doctor Vulcan (I. Stanford Jolley) in what without the super-duper rocket suit, would have been a boring generic non-thrilling thriller. I. Stanford Jolley's Dr. Vulcan is a revamp of his "Crimson Ghost" in the serial of the same name, including the shadowy figure issuing orders to his subordinates.

Special effects are the selling point. Watching the Rocket Man perform aerial feats, which had only been seen in *The Adventures of Captain Marvel* eight years previous, is a delight for fans of antiquated scotch-tape fishing-line analog special effects. *Our of print on video and laser disc; not yet an DVD.*

#### THE NEXT VOICE YOU HEAR

*MGM 1950*

Ever wonder what the voice of God would sound like? Isn't that what everybody is interested in? *The Next Voice You Hear* is a film that seems to examine all of these possibilities, and comes up with no

answers. The plot is kind of simple: God decides to broadcast ambiguous messages at 8:30 p.m. on every night for 6 days. The messages were peace and love, and vague. We get one reaction from a family, apishly portrayed by James Whitmore, Nancy Davis, with a nice supporting role awarded to Jeff Corey.

This picture gives powerful implications of professing divine wisdom, but in the end it becomes a diatribe of '50s morality. An interesting look back in time, but could be offensive to some members of contemporary audiences. The terror lies in the fact God bothered to talk to the people of Earth in the first place. I wonder who paid for the air time? *On cassette from MGM/UA Home Video.*

by Jan  
Alan  
Henderson

**DESTINATION MOON**  
*George Pal Productions, 1950*

While the majority of the story concentrates on the rigors of building a moon rocket, launching it, getting to the moon, and then getting back, the beginning of this show is brimming with paranoia about you-know-who and you-know-whats getting to the moon before our Amerika. It also boasts the idea of cooperation between corporate America and the United States government, with a bit of an Orwellian spin. The astronauts don't trust government, so they do it themselves. The start of multi-national corporations?

# ATOMIC TERRORISTS (cont'd.)

The space voyage and adventures on the moon more than make up for the paranoid pontifications at the start of the film, although being stuck on the moon is terrifying in and of itself. Available on cassette and DVD.

## THE FLYING SAUCER 1950

Much ado about nothing in this show. The Russians are accused of having developed the UFOs that America is deep in hysteria over. Here is another film that is a flight of fancy, and not much else.

A secret agent tracks down a flying saucer factory somewhere in Alaska, run by a mad scientist who hopes to sell the technology of the flying disc to the American government. (And we wonder why we have such gaping state and local deficits!) Flying saucers, indeed! *An interesting curio, and available on DVD*

and videocassette.

## THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL Fox, 1951

In today's hip-hop culture, most of the inhabitants of Washington, D.C., would think a true landing of a UFO was most probably staged by a fast-food chain as a publicity stunt. But in 1951, Robert Wise brought to life in some ways the second coming of Christ. Or, in this case, Klaatu.

Loaded with atmosphere, superb dialogue and delivery, there is not one dead frame of film in *Day The Earth Stood Still*. The message is as contemporary as it was in 1951, and it would be reassuring if a Klaatu type landed in Washington, D.C. in 2004, and maybe delivered half the message of this powerfully well-crafted film. Available on 20th Century Fox Video and DVD.

## THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD

Winchester Pictures, 1951

As inspirational an entry of sheer paranoia as *Day The Earth Stood Still*, but for completely different reasons. *Day The Earth Stood Still* sported an alien who landed in the middle of the United States of America's capitol, and walked freely among its inhabitants. *The Thing From Another World* is the reverse — based in a remote, icy retreat. A visitor from another world who wishes not to be found is unearthed by prying military men and an obsessed scientist hellbent on communicating with a vegetable from beyond our galaxy.

The claustrophobia and taut acting and directing make this entry a classic pixel of Red Menace Fifties paranoia. Was the carrot from Mars due to be a star witness at the House of Un-American Activities? Not likely. Available on videocassette and Warner Brothers DVDs.

## SUPERMAN AND THE MOLE MEN Lippert, 1951

This is the first Superman offering that was ever taken in a serious, adult manner. Clark Kent and Lois Lane are assigned to cover the deepest oil well in the world, in Selsby, Texas. It quickly becomes apparent that something more than oil is migrating northward from this geological expedition. Paranoia is rife as the townsfolk and the interloping reporters engage in verbal jousting matches that are camp today, and biting within their own time.

If you are a Superman fan, it is essential. If you're a fan of the witch hunts of the McCarthy era, it could lend an interesting point of view, which most mainstream consciousness ignores. Check out the 1951 season of *The Adventures of Superman* (shows like "The Monkey Mystery," "Double Trouble," "The Human Bomb") for super examples of '50s paranoia resolved by the planet Krypton's favorite son.

The Forties, the Fifties, the Sixties, and beyond the new millennium, what's

This and opposing page: Stills and artwork for *The Thing from Another World*.



the difference? The message is the same, yet delivered in different guises and accoutrements. The rich get richer, the poor get poorer, and paranoid get crazier, and we pay three times as much as we did a year ago to put up with this crap. What are we to do? Learn better anger management skills? Watch more movies and become anesthetized? Or, do we take a moment and take a look inside to see who we really are, who we could be, and what is real at the end of the day. There is nothing new about terrorism, international, national, statewide, citywide, or the most terrifying of all, in between our ears, let alone the schoolyard bully who started us all on the road of terror. You be the judge. After all, we all have to live in our own realities. ■



**YOUR BLOOD WILL TURN ICE-COLD!**  
**IT CREEPS...IT CRAWLS...IT STRIKES WITHOUT WARNING**



The article below is an extract from Fronk's book, "A Quaint & Curious Volume of Forgotten Lore - The Mythology & History of Classic Horror Films." Information on purchasing copies is provided at the end of this article. This extract is the fifth chapter of the book. The first four chapters deal with the 1931 versions of "Dracula," "Frankenstein," and "Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde." Hollywood producers then looked for other horror tales. They found them ostensibly in the works of Edgar Allan Poe and H. G. Wells, but indirectly took as much inspiration from Charles Darwin.

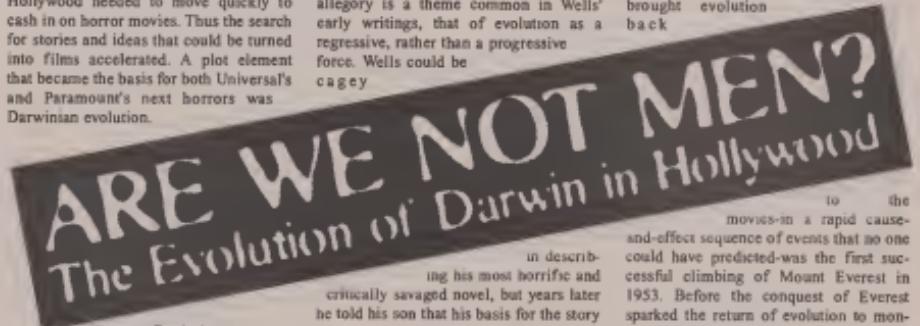
**U**niversal's *Frankenstein* opened in December 1931, was an immediate hit, and convinced the studio that the profits of *Dracula* from earlier that year were no fluke. A few weeks after *Frankenstein* came Paramount's *Dr Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, whose critical and box-office success was all the rest of Hollywood needed to move quickly to cash in on horror movies. Thus the search for stories and ideas that could be turned into films accelerated. A plot element that became the basis for both Universal's and Paramount's next horrors was Darwinian evolution.

*Origin of Species*, and never references evolution, but his murderer in the Rue Morgue is an ape. In Robert Florey's adaptation, "Erik the Ape" is controlled by Dr. Mirakle, a pre-Darwinian evolutionist out to prove his theories. Florey may never have wanted to invoke evolution, but Universal insisted that the Poe story be transformed to a star vehicle for Bela Lugosi. The writer/director saw no better means to link mad doctor and ape than to tap public curiosity with a catch phrase associated, accurately or not, with weird and fantastic images.

Wells' tale of a mad doctor performing inhuman experiments was already a tale of blood and gore. The overt message of *Island of Dr Moreau* is an unrelenting attack on "vivisection" (surgical experimentation on living animals), a topic which had been hotly debated in Britain for many years and which the young Wells had addressed in various essays. Beneath the thin veneer of the story's allegory is a theme common in Wells' early writings, that of evolution as a regressive, rather than a progressive force. Wells could be cagey

both films were strong fare, and carried the additional provocation of evolution. Neither film mentions Darwin, and both mention "evolution" only once, but Darwin's theory is at the core of their plots, the driving force behind their mad protagonists. By bitter experience with the two movies, Hollywood concluded that evolution, even if portrayed as the obsession of a madman, was a topic best avoided. After 1933 evolution is scarcely mentioned in the cinema for more than 20 years.

The discovery of DNA in 1953 made the return of evolution to popular films inevitable. DNA strengthened the evolutionists' arguments and offered storytellers some straightforward concepts easily adapted (as in *Jurassic Park*). But DNA in the 20th century, like Darwinism in the 19th, took decades to permeate popular entertainment. DNA does not figure in science fiction until well after the 1950s. The event that initially brought evolution back



Evolution was never more controversial than in the early 1930s. Newspapers had regular features on debates within the scientific community. In 1925, Creationism-versus-Evolution had played to a worldwide audience in the famous "Monkey Trial." Eugenics, an offshoot of Darwinism aimed at improving humanity by manipulating the gene pool, had many adherents in America and Britain. In Germany, the Nazis embraced an extremist version of eugenics in their districts on Aryan purity. The Nazis perverted Darwin to their needs, and so, for a brief time, did Hollywood.

Universal's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and Paramount's *Island of Lost Souls* are based on well-known works by Edgar Allan Poe and H. G. Wells. Poe's detective story needed a complete overhaul to become both a tale of evolution and a horror film. Poe died 10 years before the appearance of Darwin's *The*

in describing his most horrific and critically savaged novel, but years later he told his son that his basis for the story was:

"putting the Old Testament God in complete charge of the evolutionary process, and showing him to be fighting a losing battle to turn the brute creation he had fashioned from common clay into something closer to the angels."

Waldemar Young's and Philip Wylie's screenplay for *Island of Lost Souls* retains the novel's gore, makes evolution more explicit in the plot, and adds political and psycho-sexual undertones than aroused some censors at least as much as the explicit horrors.

Within two years of Hollywood's first great surge of horror films, enthusiasm cooled. Horrors did well enough at the box office, but the phenomenal success of the seminal classics proved difficult to repeat, and the objections of censors grew as horrors became more plentiful. Among the films that received rough treatment by the censors were *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *Island of Lost Souls*. For their day

movies-in a rapid cause-and-effect sequence of events that no one could have predicted-was the first successful climbing of Mount Everest in 1953. Before the conquest of Everest sparked the return of evolution to monster movies, Darwinism had a long, tortured history in and out of the cinema.

#### A New Idea with Old Tricks, An Old Idea with New Tricks

"Even now, for all we can tell, the coming terror may be crouching for its spring and the fall of humanity be at hand. In the case of every other predominant animal the world has ever seen...the hour of its complete ascendancy has been the eve of its entire overthrow."

—H. G. Wells' *The Extinction of Man*, 1895

The basic tenet of evolution, that new species arise from existing ones, dates from classical antiquity. Before Charles Darwin, the various notions of evolution were no more or less favored or attacked than other concepts of how, or even if, new species appear and old ones vanish. *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859, forever pushed a new theory into the vanguard of modern thought. Living things

produce more offspring than can survive. Darwin contended that due to random variations, some individuals are better suited to compete for limited resources. These individuals tend to have more descendants, to whom they pass their superior qualities. This process of "natural selection" thus slowly alters life forms as they better adapt to survive. Over time, Darwin maintained, new species evolve from the old.

Both advocates and opponents of evolution grasped the potential of Darwin's arguments. Heated debates on the theory of evolution have been underway ever since. Darwinism worked its way into popular culture even as it was damned from the pulpits. Terms like "missing link" and "survival of the fittest" entered the popular lexicon within a few years of *The Origin of Species*. Through the latter half of the 19th century, advances in paleontology and anthropology spurred the building of temple-like museums of natural history, which were in effect "centres of propaganda for evolutionary theory." Important museums opened in London, Oxford, New York, Philadelphia and Paris.

What became the Paris Museum of Natural History first opened in 1793, by decree of the same ardently atheistic revolutionaries who had orchestrated the Reign of Terror. By the 1890s the museum had added a gallery of comparative anatomy which depicted the evolution of man from ape. Certainly relatively few English-speaking peoples actually visited the museum, but so influential was its exhibits that it left a French-flavor to popular portrayals of evolution well into the 20th century. Evolution's rare appearances in the early cinema came mainly from France: *The Doctor's Experiment*, *The Monkey Man* (both 1908) and *Island of Terror* (1912), the first film adaptation of *Island of Dr. Moreau*. Dr. Mirakle works in France, as does Dr. Renault, the only 1940s Hollywood evolutionist of any note. Dr. Moreau has a French name, as does Paula Dupree, Universal's "ape girl" of the 1940s. *Planet of the Apes* came from a French writer, and mysterious French agents were still lurking in the

background in 1998's evolution-based remake of *Godzilla*.

France also produced one of the first science-fiction authors to delve into evolution themes. Maurice Renard's 1908 *Le Docteur Lerne-Sous-Dieu* still has its champions, but even in his native language Renard was eclipsed by a greater pen.

*Artificial Process*. The general theme of many of these pieces is that evolutionary forces were as likely to propel mankind to destruction as to perfection and that humans had not shed their animal origins. Wells ends his 1891 essay "Zoological Regression" with a pronouncement that became the basis for his first novels.

"Nature is, in unsuspected obscurity, equipping some now humble creature with wider possibilities of appetite, endurance, or destruction, to rise in the fullness of time and sweep homo away into the darkness from which his universe arose. The Coming Beast must certainly be reckoned in any anticipatory calculation regarding the Coming Man."

*The Time Machine*, written in 1895, gave readers what scientists have always lacked in studying Darwin: oceans of time. "The Time Traveller" (Wells gives him no other name) ventures to the year 802,701 and finds that humanity has regressed into two separate species: the surface-dwelling Eloi and the subterranean, ape-like Morlocks:

"Ages ago, thousands of generations ago, man had thrust his brother man out of the ease and the sunshine. And now that brother was coming back-changed! Already the Eloi had begun to learn one old lesson anew. They were becoming reacquainted with Fear. And suddenly there came into my head the memory of the meat I had seen in the Under-world."

Morlocks feed on the effete Eloi, who except for their curly hair fit the familiar physical description of late 20th century



H. G. Wells, born in 1866, never knew a world without Darwinism. He studied zoology under Thomas Huxley, the man perhaps most responsible for the promulgation of Darwin's theories in the late 19th century. In the 1890s Wells wrote essays on the social and human evolution, usually pessimistic in tone, with such titles as *On Extinction*, *By-Products of Evolution*, and *Human Evolution*. An

by Frank J. Dello Stritto

# ARE WE NOT MEN?

*cont'd.*

extra-terrestrials: short stature, frail physique, pointy chin, large eyes, thin lips and tiny mouths. Social metaphors in *The Time Machine* are as obvious today as in Wells' time. The brutalized under-classes of the Industrial Age were losing their humanity; but so in a different sense were the pampered upperclasses who alone enjoyed the full comforts of modernity.

*The Time Machine* has a harder edge than either of the two major film adaptations based on it (made in 1960 and 2001). In both movies, only the Morlocks have appreciably evolved away from humans. The Eloi are a beautiful people; and the movies end with the lonely Time Traveller finding love with Weena. In the novel, the Eloi are quite non-human, and little Weena's fate is unknown. She may be captured by the Morlocks or die in a fire. The Time Traveller does not, as he does in the films, free the Eloi from the Morlocks. He flees to the future. Before he returns to his own time, he goes forward another 30,000,000 years, and finds a dark, desolate planet barely illuminated by a dying sun and supporting only base forms of life.

Wells' fascination with "zoological regression" took more brutal form in 1896's *Island of Dr. Moreau*. Midway through the story, after shipwrecked Edward Prendick encounters the strange inhabitants of Moreau's island, the doctor reveals his terrible secret. The "natives" have been created from animals:

"These creatures you have seen are animals carved and wrought into new shapes. To that-to the study of plasticity of living forms-my life has been devoted...It all lay in the surface of practical anatomy years ago, but no one had the temerity to touch it. It's not simply the outward form of the animal that I can change. The physiology, the chemical rhythm of the creature may also be made to undergo an enduring modification."

Moreau has lost any empathy with other living things, any concern for the suffering that he causes. He, not his "beast folk," is the true monster. His "enduring modifications" are achieved by weeks of surgery without anesthesia. Moreau sees such tortures as necessary to his rule of the island. All the beast folk live in dread memory of his "House of Pain." As he calmly lectures Prendick, Moreau reveals a Darwinian streak:

"I never yet heard of a useless thing that was not ground out of existence by evolution sooner or later. Did you? And pain gets needless...This store men and women put on pleasure and pain, Prendick, is the mark of the beast upon them, the mark of the beast from which they came. Pain! Pain and pleasure-they are for us only so long as we wriggle in the mud...These animals without courage, these fear-haunted, pain-driven things, without a spark of pugnacious energy to face torment-they are no good for man-making."

Moreau's inhuman discourse echoes some of Wells' own earlier writings. An 1894 essay, *Province of Pain*, ends with the cold conclusion that

"the province of pain is after all a limited and transitory one: a phase through which life must pass on its evolution from the automatic to the spiritual; and, so far as we can tell, among all the hosts of space, pain is found only on the surface of this little planet."

Prendick arrives on the island on the same ship with a caged panther. Day-by-day her cries of agony in the House of Pain become more human. Wells heaps horror upon horror. The animal people are truly grotesque (and occasionally caricatures, if not of specific people, than of types for which Wells cared little). Moreau in his experiments somehow blends different animals into his beast folk: a fox-bear woman, a hyena-swine man, 67 monstrosities in all. Prendick eventually escapes the island, but can never again find peace in human society. Just as he saw the humanity in Moreau's beast folk, he always sees the beast in his fellow man.

Many contemporary reviewers found *Island of Dr. Moreau* disgusting. The text begs the interpretation of God as cruel and unfeeling, religion as a sham, and Man as destined to return to his bestial roots. Wells added a note to the text, which gave *Island of Dr. Moreau* an overt social message on the hot-button issue of vivisection. The postscript brought a backlash from the science community, of which Wells considered himself a member in good standing. The general reception of *Island of Dr. Moreau* distressed Wells, whose fiction soon took on a more optimistic tone.

The literary genre of science fiction

took more inspiration from the Industrial Revolution than from Darwin. Evolution is not a common theme in turn-of-the-century novels. Darwinism, when it appears, is more an undercurrent than a basis for the stories. George Du Maurier intended his 1897 novel *The Martian* as a utopian dream. Today it reads instead as a eugenics nightmare: by selective breeding, state-sanctioned suicide and perhaps more dire measures, the human race purges itself of all undesirables. Professor Challenger-the bombastic hero of *The Lost World* and other Arthur Conan Doyle stories-is a confirmed Darwinian. Challenger explains the lost plateau in evolutionary terms, and declares its apemen, the Doda, the missing link. No sooner does he make that discovery than he joins the local natives in attacking the Doda. Challenger proclaims the Doda's extermination a great victory for mankind.

In Conan Doyle's *The Poison Belt*, a lethal ether engulfs the world and threatens the extinction of all animal life. Challenger is delighted that amoebas are immune:

"Here in this tiny creature are the roots of growth of the animal world, and by its inherent development, and evolution, it will surely in time remove every trace of this incomparable crisis."

Challenger's assessment of the ether's progress may reflect a prevalent view of the hierarchy of human evolution:

"The less developed races have been the first to respond to its influence. There are deplorable accounts from Africa, and the Australian aborigines appear to have been exterminated. The Northern races have as yet shown greater resisting power than the Southern...India and Persia appear to be utterly wiped out. The Slavonic population of Austria is down, while the Teutonic has hardly been affected."

If some blatant eugenacists in early scientific romances are portrayed as heroic, their rare counterparts in the early cinema are truly mad doctors. *Variety* described 1919's *A Scream in the Night* as "little atheism, agnosticism, and a large dose of Darwinism, throw in an Episcopal clergyman and a scientist." Exactly what principle of Darwinism the film's scientist hopes to prove by his crazy schemes is unclear, but he forces a girl to live in the jungle for 11 years, and then tosses her to a "killer ape." In 1922's *A Blind Bargain* Dr. Lamb (Lon Chaney) hopes to extend human longevity by transplants of ape glands into humans. *A Blind Bargain* like many films uses "glands" as a substitute for "evolution" in

transforming man to beast. Lamb never succeeds in his quest, but he does create at least two ape-men, one of them also played by Chaney. The other ape-man in *A Blind Bargain* was Wallace Beery in an unbilled cameo appearance.

Three years later Beery became the movies' first Prof. Challenger in *The Lost World*, which previewed in February 1925 as another, real-life melodrama began. In state legislatures across America a series of "anti-evolution bills"-proposals to ban teaching evolution in public schools-were introduced. Most were defeated, but Tennessee's "Butler Bill" passed in early March 1925. The American Civil Liberties Union immediately offered to defend any challenge to the new law. That challenge soon arose in Dayton, Tennessee, and what became billed as "the trial of the century" was underway. From its very inception, this quintessentially American event had a touch of show business. The city fathers of tiny Dayton had hatched the scheme to capitalize on the nation-wide controversy stirred by the Butler Bill. Schoolteacher John T. Scopes allegedly taught evolution (though it is questionable that he ever actually did), and another Daytonian saw that charges were brought. The plan succeeded wonderfully: advocates on both sides of the issue and journalists from across the country and then from around the world descended on Dayton. Dayton protected its primacy as the focal point of the trial: a May 20th headline in *The New York Times* reads "Dayton Citizens Protest Sharing Trial Publicity With Chattanooga." Three-time presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan volunteered to lead the prosecution; civil provocateur Clarence Darrow headed the defense, and the show was on. By July, Scopes was convicted and fined \$100, but both sides claimed victory.

Evolution, scarcely mentioned in the movies before the Scopes Trial, disappeared from the cinema for seven years. *The Wizard* (1927) introduced what is still the movies' oddest-looking ape-man, created by the mad Dr. Coriolus (Gustav von Seyffertitz) via skin grafts. *The Mysterious Island* (1929) features a race of humanoids living on the ocean floor, but never speculates on how they got there. The director and special effects wizard of *The Lost World* (Harry Hoyt and Willis O'Brien) began another epic of prehistoric life. Despite its working title, surviving drafts of "Creation" do not delve into the mysteries of life. The film was never completed.

Frederic March's make-up in 1931's *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* is based on the

Neanderthal Man: a fact that is only known because director Rouben Mamoulian spoke of it later. No mention of Neanderthals appears in contemporary publicity for the film. But *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde* helped trigger the mad scramble for horror stories to turn into films, and signaled a brief end to Hollywood's ambivalence about evolution.

#### **Murders in the Rue Morgue - 1932**

*Murders in the Rue Morgue* begins with a strange tour of anthropology. Two medical students and their girlfriends in 1845 Paris attend a carnival. Amidst the joyous chaos, they watch sideshows of exotic Arab dancers and "blood-thirsty savages" from the American west. These are strange sites to the throng. "Do they bite?" asks a person in the crowd. "Is that their real color?" wonders another. Their stroll down the midway is a descent on the ladder of human development: from Paris, the very center of civilization, to the remote wilderness. At the last of the sideshows waits the possible ancestor of all man. To enter the exhibit, the quartet passes beneath the arched loins of a huge painted gorilla. In the womb-like tent is revealed to them the miracle of life explained with great fervor by the aptly named Dr. Mirakle (Bela Lugosi), as his assistants Janos ("the Black One") and Erik, a caged ape, watch him. Mirakle explains his theory of evolution. "His" theory because Darwin will not publish for another 14 years. The film is filled with such anachronisms: the dome of Sacre Coeur, not built until the 1870s, dominates the skyline of 1845 Paris.

None of the film's opening scene is found in Poe's 1841 short story. Poe's Auguste Dupin is not a medical student but a precursor of Sherlock Holmes, who turns his deductive powers to solving some strange killings in Paris. The movie's Pierre Dupin (Leon Wyckoff, later Leon Ames) is also intrigued by two grisly murders. Pierre is a typical 1930s romantic lead, but he has a taste for the macabre. Pierre uses his meager student stipend to bribe the morgue attendant to allow him to dissect the victims' bodies and take away blood samples. He is vaguely implicated in body snatching. Brian Taves sees Mirakle as Pierre's distorted mirror image:

"Lugosi represents in many ways the darker side of Ames' work (the two scientists are frequently paralleled in both plot and visuals), as his friends and fiancée worry about all the time he spends at the morgue."

This side of Dupin's character is effectively masked by Ames' excess of youth-

ful charm and exuberance.

In his carnival tent, Mirakle stands before a huge painting which shows 13 steps on the "tree of life" from first creation to man. The mural is not too different than similar ones used today in science classrooms. Its first five life forms are simple organisms; steps six through eight are fish; the next two are reptiles; the next two primates; and then man. To the side of the stage stands a smaller painting, approximately four feet by three feet, which details the transition between the murl's steps 12 and 13, between the knuckle-walk ape and the upright human. The painting mimics the display in the Paris museum's gallery of comparative anatomy, which French-born director Robert Florey probably saw as a child.

With his audience seated, Mirakle speaks:

"The shadow of Erik the ape hangs over us all, the dark before the dawn of man. Here is the story of man. In the slime of chaos, there was a seed that rose and grew into the tree of life. Life was motion. Fins changed into wings; wings into ears. Crawling reptiles grew legs. Sons of ages passed. There came a time when a four-legged thing walked upright. Behold the first man!"

A well-dressed Parisian yells "Heresy!" Mirakle responds:

"Heresy? Heresy? Do they still burn men for heresy? Then burn me, Monsieur. Light the fire. Do you think your little candle will outshine the flame of truth?...I will prove your kinship with the ape. Erik's blood shall be mixed with the blood of man!"

The more carnal implication of Mirakle's quest was not lost on audiences of 1932. Kariety commented that:

"The blood injection angle isn't exposed until a good number of feet [of film] have unwound. Until then, it can be easily assumed by any auditor that the doc's idea is to mate the women with the ape."

Of Mirakle's unbelieving audience, Dupin alone is intrigued by the doctor's theories. He has not yet guessed that "the blood of man" does not interest Mirakle. Mirakle experiments only on women, the same women whose bodies Dupin has probed at the morgue. Mirakle violates them in life; Dupin in death.

Mirakle's experiments on abducted women end only in their deaths and with their bodies dumped in the Seine. The mad doctor has no doubts about his theory, and blames his subjects. In the one abduction shown onscreen, Mirakle painfully extracts a sample from the tortured, dying girl (Arlene Francis). What

# ARE WE NOT MEN?

*cont'd.*

blood analysis he could perform with 1840s technology is never disclosed, but he peers into his microscope and screams:

"Rotten blood! Your blood is rotten-black as your sins! You cheated me. Your beauty was a lie."

The microorganisms that cause venereal disease would not be discovered for another 60 years. Mirakle would not be the first or last mad doctor to race ahead of science on many fronts, but most likely he only finds in his microscope what he wants to see, and seizes any excuse to continue his quest. But his search for what he calls "the bride of science" is only a cover. His weird experiments never prove anything and are only his rationalization for his horrendous crimes.

Mirakle's unbearable solitude and sorrow surface in the doctor's less manic moments. He weeps with grief when the girl dies on his laboratory rack—a strange combination of a torture device and sacrificial altar. He laments, "will my search never end?" Mirakle translates Erik's "language" at his carnival show. From the gibberish he extracts a tale of the ape's loss of home and family and his yearning for a mate. The doctor is obviously speaking of himself. After his attentions fall on the lovely Camille (Sadie Fox), he peers in longing at her balcony where Dupin embraces her and professes his love. Such intimacy is denied to Mirakle. Mirakle's note to Camille, to lure her to his laboratory, reveals a touch of the romantic:

"You are lovely. Who knows what the future holds for you? Great things are written on the stars. Erik and I will read them for you. Tonight—the carnival come."

Like Dracula, Mirakle can only destroy the ones he desires, destroy them because his experiments produces only death.

Meanwhile, Dupin is also peering into his microscope; and in the veins of all the recent victims he identifies ape blood (yet another stretch for 1840s hematology). His suspicions fall on Mirakle, but not before Erik kidnaps Camille and kills her mother. The violent killing (the body is stuffed up a chimney flue) and the neighbors' reactions to the screaming are the only parts of Poe's story retained in the film. In the Poe original, Camille is also murdered, but in the movie Erik carries her to Mirakle, who declares her

blood perfect for his experiment. Like Dupin and Mirakle, Erik desires Camille, who somehow arouses a lethal streak in the otherwise docile ape. He attempts to strangle Dupin the first time he sees her, kills her mother the second time and finally Mirakle the third and last time. Thomas Doherty sees more than murder and abduction in Erik's visit to Camille's flat:

"What transpires during the cross-cut commotion... can be interpreted in only one way: the gorilla is raping one of the women. Two brief shots repeat the same image: the gorilla's head and upper torso thrusting downward as grunts and shrieks fill the soundtrack."

In a finale that anticipates *King Kong* a year later, Erik carries Camille to the rooftops, puts her down to confront Dupin, and is gunned down.

*Murders in the Rue Morgue* opened in New York on February 10, 1932, where *Variety* noted that Mirakle's plot to mix human and ape blood was not revealed "until a good number of feet have unwound." Yet in the existing prints, Mirakle explains his great experiment only nine minutes after the opening credits. The changes to the original version of the film may be a result of what happened in Chicago a few days earlier. Chicago, despite its free-wheeling reputation, was a tough town on film censorship; and many cities with large Catholic populations followed the film ratings of its Legion of Decency. On first screening, city censors banned *Murders in the Rue Morgue* entirely. Universal, faced with the loss of a large metropolitan market, rushed into negotiations with the censors.

Whether the Chicago crisis is responsible for the film in its surviving form can only be guessed, but the re-editing is evident in the prints. Two separate scenes of Mirakle in a coach—the first when he abducts the prostitute, the second when he visits Camille's flat—are combined. Erik is with him in the second scene, but not the first. In the surviving prints, the ape incongruously appears in both Pierre's and Camille's love scene is divided in two, with part coming early in the film and part coming near the end. Clearly the two were once joined, for Camille is wearing the same dress in both. The clip of film containing Mirakle's "heresy" speech is in a different state of preservation than the rest of the

film, a sure sign that it was removed and left in a vault until restored sometime later. Most likely, Universal was scrambling to get the film approved in time for its Chicago opening, and reordered and deleted scenes as necessary.

The original cut that apparently played in New York was replaced by a somewhat confused version. The pre-Chicago film probably began with Mirakle's abduction (the first coach scene, without Erik) and murder of the prostitute. As in *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, the plot first establishes its protagonist in his private world before shifting to a less stark setting. The prostitute's body is brought to the morgue, where Dupin promptly appears to acquire a blood sample. Mirakle's quest is at last disclosed in the carnival scene, where Erik is first introduced. "Erik's blood shall be mixed with the blood of man" would have come more than 20 minutes into the film. The doctor's attractiveness to Camille thus has a menace it lacks without the earlier scenes. The last coach ride brings Erik to Camille's flat, where the ape kidnaps her and kills her mother.

Editing destroyed much of Robert Florey's pacing and story construction. The simple story becomes convoluted. The parallels between Mirakle and Dupin—the film's chief claim to any depth—are greatly diminished. Mirakle's speech on evolution remained, but his pronouncement to "prove your kinship with the ape" disappeared. The altered film is buoyed by Florey's and cinematographer Karl Freund's unique expressionistic atmosphere and by Lugosi's over-the-top performance, but is definitely a flawed work. Later in 1932, when *Murders in the Rue Morgue* opened in London, a reviewer complained "the development of the story is so jerky and obscure that it is difficult to make out what is happening."

## Island of Lost Souls — 1933

Through 1932 Hollywood produced about one new horror film per month. By the end of the year, just as Paramount completed its follow-up to *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*, some studios considered the new craze to be over. *Island of Lost Souls* is an unrelenting horror film; yet an almost comical notice ran in *Variety* two months before the film's release in January 1933:

"Admittedly a horror picture, Paramount is trying to find a selling angle for *Island of Lost Souls* that will eliminate reference to it as such. With the cycle of blood and thunder deemed passed, studio is afraid 'Lost Souls' will

do a dive unless the creepy angle is eliminated."

A few months earlier Paramount had launched a nation-wide talent hunt for a young actress to play Lota the "panther woman." The panther woman in Wells' novel is a huge, fearsome creature, which breaks its chains and kills Moreau. Lota in Wylie's and Young's adaptation is more kitten than tigress: an exotic beauty that passes for human and falls in love with Edward Parker (the novel's Edward Prendick). As in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and even in 1919's *A Scream in the Night*, evolution in horror films translates into cross-species mating.

The talent contest was wildly successful. Paramount's head of publicity Arthur Mayer recalled the campaign to find the "Panther Woman of America" in his autobiography, *Merely Colossal*:

"All over the country, attractive lasses, regardless of rosy cheeks and dovelike features, flooded the offices of the newspapers with whom we were co-operating... Local winners, the Panther Woman of Dixie, New England, Rocky Mountains and the like, were transported to Hollywood for the final eliminations... Among these, the final victor was a charming though scarcely talented young woman from Chicago, where, by a peculiar coincidence, Paramount happened to operate more theatres than in any other city."

In stark contrast to the public relations frivolity is the grim film itself. Wylie's & Young's script retains all the gore of Wells' novel, adds lust and perversity, and unlike most 1930s horrors, is devoid of any comic relief (such as provided in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* by Bert Roach as Dupin's room mate).

Also added is a plot twist not possible in the pre-Marconi 1896 novel: when Parker (Richard Arlen) is rescued at sea, a radiogram is sent ahead to his fiancée Ruth (Leila Hyams). As in the book, the Covena's drunken skipper throws Parker overboard at Moreau's island, but in the movie news of his survival has reached the outside world, and triggers the events that end in the beast men's revolt and Moreau's horrific death. Wells' monsters never revolt en masse and are hardly all "men." Except for Lota (Kathleen Burke) the lost souls of Paramount's island are male. The arrival of the beautiful Ruth to retrieve Parker is their first look at a human woman. Their frenzy feeds an uprising that Moreau cannot suppress.

Director Erle C. Kenton and cinematographer Karl Struss, both still photographers from the 1920s, turned out a

film of haunting visuals. Exteriors were shot on Catalina Island, and a fog came and went throughout the entire schedule. Stress incorporated the haze into his filming, creating a claustrophobic feel quite unique in 1930s horror films. The atmosphere is matched by the very appearance of Charles Laughton's coolly satanic Dr. Moreau. The round actor's sole wardrobe is a tight-fitting plantation suit, which at times seems to glow in the fog. Laughton "creates a frightening picture of a gentleman-monster," writes Simon Callow:



The Morlocks as they appear in artwork for 1960's *The Time Machine*.

"somehow suggesting that he himself is one of his own half-animal/half-humans... his clothes and indeed his very body can barely contain overwhelming impulses and desires."

Moreau's beast men struggle to suppress their animal natures. "The stubborn beast flesh crawling back," complains Moreau, "day by day it creeps back." Moreau never questions his rule over the beast men; but from every shadow, every crevice one is watching and waiting, restrained from the old animal ways only by horrific memories of the House of Pain. The Sayer of the Law (Bela Lugosi),

one of the beast men, leads them in a ritual chant of Moreau's rules of conduct: not to walk on all fours, not to drink blood, not to eat meat. Their refrain to each dictum is "are we not men?" Moreau's world self-destructs when they finally realize that they are not. Until then the doctor rules as a god. "His is the hand that makes," is the Sayer's closing prayer, "His is the hand that heals. His is the House of Pain."

Laughton is brilliant as the obscenely serene Moreau, as is Arthur Hohl as his anguished assistant Montgomery. The rest of the cast is fine, but the eerie portrayals of the beast men haunt the memory. Tetsu Komai as M'ling, Moreau's once and still loyal dog, and Hans Steinke as the lustful, hulking Ours are superb in their small roles, but all the bit players wonderfully suggest both beast and man, and their dawning self-awareness. Kathleen Burke, winner of the beauty contest, usually gets bad press from film critics, but her childlike Lota is exactly the character needed to emphasize Moreau's sadistic tortures. She writhes as Moreau boasts to Montgomery, "This time I'll burn out all the animal in her. I'll make her completely human."

After Parker witnesses the ritual of the law, Moreau reveals his secret, more overtly driven by evolution than in the novel:

"I started with plant life in London 20 years ago. I took an orchid and upon it I performed a miracle. I stripped a 100,000 years of slow evolution from it, and I no longer had an orchid, but what orchids will be 100,000 years from now... I let my imagination run fantastically ahead... Why not experiment with the more complex organisms? Man is the present climax of a long process of organic evolution. All animal life is tending toward the human form."

Moreau does get fantastic results; but he has less grasp of the principles of evolution than does mad Dr. Miracle. Animals are not evolving towards humans, and the future course of life is not encoded in the cells. Evolution contends the opposite, that life will adapt to whatever conditions arise. Moreau has corrupted evolution, not accelerated it. He admits as much when he tells Parker that he must employ "plastic surgery, blood transfusions, gland extracts, ray baths" to approach the human form and to keep the beast men from reverting. Still, Moreau is overwhelmed by his success:

"My work! My discoveries! Mine

# ARE WE NOT MEN?

*cont'd.*

alone! With these I have wiped out 100,000 years of evolution...With each experiment I improve upon the last. I get nearer and nearer...Do you know what it means to feel like God?"

The censors did not like men playing god. In *Frankenstein*, Universal had the good sense to drown out with a clap of thunder the doctor's manic proclamation "Now I know what it means to be God!" Not so on the island of lost souls: Moreau links himself to the Divine in his usual calm manner.

After this display of self-worship, the film begins to diverge from Wells' novel. Moreau, like Mirakle, uses evolution as a guise for his own sick plans, and he too now focuses on cross-species mating as his ultimate triumph. Lota will mate, Moreau hopes, with Parker and perhaps have offspring. With this plot twist, the film was flirting with the taboo topic of miscegenation. Lota is presented to Parker as "pure Polynesia," probably the only non-white race for which 1930s censors would allow implication of sexual relations with white (as would be the case in 1935's *Mutiny on the Bounty*).

Parker is attracted to Lota, but refuses. Moreau, at last behaving like a true evolutionist, decides to let "time and monotony do the rest." The waiting game is interrupted by Ruth's arrival, and the beast men's obvious reaction to her. Moreau whispers to Montgomery, "I may not need Parker."

Ruth and Captain Donohue (Paul Hurst) are welcomed into Moreau's compound, but Moreau also admits the leering Ouran. That night Ouran attempts to rape Ruth, but flees when Parker and Donohue rush into her room. Donohue tries to return through the jungle to his ship for help. Moreau dispatches Ouran to stop him, and Ouran kills the captain. Moreau never appreciates that his beast-men see these strange "people from the sea" as gods like himself. With Donohue's death, not only is the law broken, but so is the myth of Moreau's immortality. "He can die?" asks Ouran in a child-like voice. "He can die," confirms the Sayer of the Law. The beast men pick up the chant, "He can die! He can die!" This original sin in Moreau's Eden brings self-awareness and shame. The Sayer replaces Moreau's prayer with a new one:

"You made us in the House of Pain. You made us Thing! Not man. Not beast. Part man. Part beast. Thing!"

The beast-men repeat "Part man. Part beast. Thing." Moreau confronts his creations, expecting them to cower before him. They drag him into the House of Pain, clasp his surgical knives as best they can with their misshapen hands, and take their revenge. Cinematographer Karl Struss' favorite shot proved too strong for this very strong film and was removed from the final cut:

"I had a subjective camera shot there again, as in 'Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde,' when the evil doctor is murdered by the creatures on the island, and he looks up and sees the vivisectional instruments over him in a kind of forest of steel."

Parker, Ruth and Montgomery flee to Donohue's ship with the unsated Ouran in heated pursuit. Lota, still sprouting remnants of panther claws, protects the man she loves. Both beast people die in their struggle.

Thanks to its rich dialogue and lush performances, *Island of Lost Souls* invites any number of readings. Benshoff's *Monsters in the Closet*, details "the theme of a male couple seeking to create human life homosexuality," but also asserts that the film "blurs together discourses surrounding not only homosexuality, but also race, gender and colonialism, here filtered through bestiality":

"A queer reading of *Island of Lost Souls* is encouraged by Charles Laughton's performance...Laughton, with much winking and smirking, manages to milk every salacious drop out of each line he speaks. He slyly notes that Edward Parker will 'be wanting a cold shower' after his encounter with one of Moreau's hairy 'mammals.' When he remarks that his assistant Montgomery is 'a fair sort of sailor,' it is hard to miss the activated connotation of the word 'sailor'...Neither Moreau nor Montgomery exhibit heterosexual desire, although the former exhibits an active bitchy misogyny."

Thomas Doherty's "Pre-Code Hollywood" agrees that Moreau is an obscene degenerate, but is more intrigued with the film's political allegory, "a missing link between the horror film and the racial adventure film, between fears of personal violation and political insurrection." Filmed during the Great Depression, *Island of Lost Souls* offers "revolutionary monstrosities":

"a bestial lumpen proletarian revolt

against their tyrannical creator-ruler...[The beast men] bound about a bonfire like boobies in a Hooverville...[Moreau] has usurped the prerogative of the Creator, but unlike Frankenstein, his purpose is social, to create not a single man but a body politic. The insurrection of Moreau's minions, the murder of the sovereign, and the overthrow of the natural order were actions more politically dangerous than anything in *Frankenstein*."

Moreau's main use for the beast men after their creation is to generate energy to run his laboratory. A brief scene shows his "powerhouse"-a stair-step paddle-wheel turned by manual labor rather than water. A row of beast men struggle to hold their balance while turning the wheel. Such machines were actually used in British prisons and workhouses until at least the late 19th century (one can be glimpsed briefly in 1997's *Wilde*, a film biography of Oscar Wilde), within the living memory of some of *Island of Lost Souls* first audiences.

*The New York Times* called *Island of Lost Souls* a "ghastly affair," but appreciated the atmospheric filming and particularly Charles Laughton. *Variety* praised it without reservation, and predicted it would do fine business. The censors saw that it did not. *Island of Lost Souls*, like *Freaks*, was banned entirely in Britain, and then in Germany, Hungary, India, Latvia, Holland and South Africa.

Several times in the movie, the location of Moreau's island is clearly given as 15°S, 170°W. Those co-ordinates mean little to American filmgoers, but they place Moreau close to Samoa, and not too far from the island nations to the west. These nations, too, gave "*Island of Lost Souls*" a rough reception. New Zealand, Singapore and Tasmania banned it. Australia passed it with a special rating NEN (Not to be Exhibited to Natives): "else the aborigines too begin to ask," ponders Doherty, "are we not men?" Early in the film Moreau explains that he learned to handle a whip as a boy in Australia.

*Island of Lost Souls* fared only slightly better in the United States. The Production Code Administration objected to implications of cross-species mating in early drafts of the script, but as yet lacked the clout to force any changes. The initial task of keeping *Island of Lost Souls* off domestic screens fell to the local censors. Arthur Mayer, proud of his *Panther Woman* publicity, recounts the dismal box office returns in America. In 1935, when Paramount attempted to re-issue the

film, the strengthened PCA refused it a certificate. The studio tried again in 1941, and succeeded only by making cuts demanded by chief censor Joseph Breen to remove any suggestion:

"...that Moreau considers himself on a par with God...that Moreau attempts to mate the beast girl with a human being...that he encourages the mating of a beast man with a human being."

*Island of Lost Souls* is today generally acknowledged as one of the great horror classics of the early 1930s, but the censorship outcry kept it off screens or heavily edited for many years. The British Board of Film Censors declared it against natural law. Laughton's wife Elsa Lanchester replied, "So's Mickey Mouse." The film would not play at all in Britain until 1958.

### Islands of Lost Evolution

Before vanishing completely from the movies for almost a decade, evolution appeared twice more in 1933, both times rather incongruously appended onto another plot. *Beast of Borneo* is a typical low-budget jungle film: an expedition sets out to find an orangutan, alleged in the film's prologue to be the "nearest living creature in thought and action to the human being." Evil vivisectionist Dr. Borodoff wants to prove his theory of "evolution of mentality among the primates." The orangutan kills the doctor, while the white hunter wins the hand of his assistant. *The Monster Walks* is an old house mystery, complete with secret passageways, clutching hands, and a late-night reading of a will. Upstairs lies the body of the patriarch, a "proponent of the Darwin theory" (perhaps the first actual mention of Darwin's name in sound films) and in the basement is his caged ape. Thereafter, evolution disappears from the movies.

The great popularity of 1941's *The Wolf Man* inspired a whole sub-genre of films on man's link to the beast, but even films with ape-men and ape-women ignore evolution almost entirely. In *The Ape Man*, Bela Lugosi's scientist experiments on himself and transforms into a monster from injections of spinal fluid. In Universal's three *Ape Girl* films of the mid-1940s (*Captive Wild Woman*, *Jungle Woman* and *Jungle Captive*), an ape's transformation to the beautiful Paula Dupree is achieved by transplants and injections. The doctors in these films are gland specialists and give no hint that they ever heard of Darwin.

Dr. Renault's *Secret* (1942), retells the familiar plot from the ape man's perspective. Renault (George Zucco) captures a

gorilla for "experimental humanization." Gland transplants, with brain surgery, nerve grafts and plastic surgery result in Noel (J. Carroll Naish), deemed close enough to human that in time the right environment will yield a complete man. At Renault's chateau the strange new handyman has a human counterpart in the gardener Rogell (Mike Mazuka), an ex-convict descended from a long line of criminals. The two characters are paralleled throughout the film. Both men's passions center on Renault's niece: Noel adores her, Rogell plans to kidnap her. Their dreams are the same. Noel wants to return to the jungle; Rogell to use the ransom money for an idyllic life in Tahiti. Noel grasps the human motives of Renault. When he rebels against the doctor, creator and created clash:

Renault: For years I worked to change your appearance, to make you talk. But you endanger all I've done for the sake of your twisted animal jealousy. Look at you!

Noel: You make me like this, but you do not help me. Why you no left me like I was. I remember good things

Renault: Good things? Animal pleasures!

Noel: I was free. But you take me away. You chained me, hurt me, want to make me like man. Why? To make me happy? No. To make you big doctor...

Renault: Stop, or I'll punish you.

Noel: You only punish because I let you.

Noel kills Renault, saves the niece from Rogell and dies with him as they battle.

"Glands" had become Hollywood's code word "evolution," but Darwinism gets an occasional nod in 1940s movies. In 1941's "The Monster & The Girl," George Zucco's Dr. Parry transplants a human brain into a gorilla. Perhaps mindful of the censors, the script has Parry praise the Almighty in the same breath as alluding to Darwin:

"This night's dreaming will have sped him up a million years in the pattern of evolution...the human brain, even more than the human heart, is God's greatest handiwork."

In 1944's "Return of the Ape Man," a scientist revives a prehistoric ape man long frozen in ice, and upgrades its reasoning with a partial brain transplant. "I've advanced his mind 20,000 years in a few hours," extols Prof. Dexter (Bela Lugosi).

With or without evolution, a half dozen films of the early 1940s milked the same plot of ape becoming man or man becoming ape. Old-fashioned horror

limped into the 1950s with no new ideas. *Bride of the Gorilla* (1951) conjured its monster via black magic; in *The Neanderthal Man* (1951), a doctor again injects himself with a mysterious serum to become a beast. An almost coherent explanation of evolution can be extracted from the largely incoherent *Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla* (1952). Dr. Zabor explains:

"All living things originated in a process of evolution...There is a growth force that tends to make genetic changes...Chimpanzees and gorillas are the highest members of the ape family and are the ancestors of man...I have found the chemical formula that generates the growth force. Where nature takes years, I can in a matter of hours make a complete embryonic metamorphosis."

DNA was discovered a year later in 1953.

For a quarter of a century of film portrayals of ape and ape-man, H. G. Wells' basic plot for *Island of Dr Moreau* varied little: evolution usurped and perverted by mad doctors, who are destroyed by their own creations. Almost forgotten in popular culture was the basis for Wells' *The Time Machine*: evolution taught that somewhere in the shadows may lurk a humble creature waiting for its opportunity to displace Man.

While movie mad doctors pursued incredible researches, real-life adventurers followed their less fantastic but often no less dangerous quests. Mount Everest, the world's tallest mountain, had claimed more than a dozen lives of those who attempted to reach its summit. A team finally did so on May 29, 1953, and riveted world attention. News stories of the climbers and the strange world where the drama unfolded filled the press. By late 1953 a documentary of the adventure was in theatres, playing to excellent business. Only then did the abominable snowman or yeti—the legendary ape-man living in the frozen wastes high in the Himalayas—become well known. Tales of the yeti had reached the west since at least the 1920s. The evidence was usually tracks of huge footprints in the snow. Sightings of such tracks captured press attention in 1921, 1937 and 1951, but popular interest had soon waned. The popular fancy sparked by the conquest of Everest transferred to the search for the abominable snowman. An expedition set out in early 1954 to prove its existence, manned by some of the same people who scaled Everest.

No movie about the abominable snowman had ever been made. Four films—all

# ARE WE NOT MEN?

*cont'd.*

low budget, three of them of abysmal quality – appeared in the next four years. In all, the scientists' discussions of the yeti veer towards evolution as the explanation for the strange creature.

Publicity for the first one, 1954's *Snow Creature*, proclaims: "Millions gasped as they read about it in *Life*, *Time* and *Argosy* magazines... Brought back alive, only to leave a trail of death and destruction." What is on screen is far more tame. A botanical expedition in the Himalayas stumbles on a yeti, captures it and ships it to Los Angeles. The yeti's chance to escape comes from a delay with U.S. Immigration. Is the creature man or beast, the authorities ask. The question is never answered; the police corner the escaped yeti in the sewer drains (the same drains where they would trap *Them!* that same year) and gun it down.

In 1955 came *Julia Yoko*, a tale of ape-men living in the mountains of northern Japan. Released in America in 1958 as *Half Human*, the English-language version strips off the Japanese soundtrack, and replaces scenes of dialogue with new footage of American scientists discussing the beast. John Carradine narrates the silent action. At an autopsy of an ape-man, the scientists marvel at its closeness to man:

Prof. Osborne: Would you say that over a period of 200,000 years this species' system as it grew might slowly evolve into man?

Dr. Jordan: It might not take anything like 200,000 years. If we could control the animal part of his brain, and effectively treat his glands, well I should say in that event in perhaps 10 or 15 generations.

At the film's conclusion Carradine pronounces that work must continue to "learn the complete story of the evolution of man."

Both films raise the familiar topic of bestiality. The *Snow Creature*, who kills his own mate and offspring rather than let them be captured, attacks only women when he escapes. The *Half-Humans* from Japan are males, with a particular fondness for human women. Asked if such a creature could be attracted to human women, Dr. Jordan shrugs, "his anatomy at maturity would be almost human." These randy yetis at last speak for themselves in 1956's *Man Beast*, in the form of Varga (George Skafte), a mysterious, part-yeti mountain guide. Just as H. G.

Wells' Morlocks cannot tolerate light, the yetis are confined to the mountains by their need for cold temperatures. Interbreeding is their plan to breakout into the larger world. Even Varga, himself a fifth generation cross-breed, has little taste for warm climates. He ensures that expeditions into yeti country meet terrible ends while any women in the teams are abducted for breeding. The scheme collapses when Varga fails to his death while pursuing his intended human mate.

The budding sub-genre of yeti films was following a familiar trajectory of monster sagas: kill the men, abduct the women until 1957's under-rated *Abominable Snowman*, a cunning combination of eastern thought and Wells' warning of the Coming Beast. Yet another expedition is launched to find the yeti. Dr. Rollason (Peter Cushing) believes the creature is a lost branch of primate evolution.

The known branches of Man are well represented at the small Tibetan monastery where the expedition assembles: Rollason, the intellectual man; adventurer Tom Friend, the instinctive man; the monastery's Lhama, the spiritual man. Friend (Forrest Tucker) boasts that he is driven by "fear, hunger and curiosity." And redemption: by capturing a live yeti, Friend hopes to wipe out his shady past. Rollason and the Lhama (Arnold Marle) have more in common, but the Lhama sees Rollason's desire to increase human knowledge as self-serving as Friend's search for fame and fortune:

"Remember that you act in the name of mankind and act humbly, for man is near to forfeiting his right to lead the world. He faces destruction by his own hand. Now, when a ruler king is near death, he should not be seeking to extend his realm, but take thought who might with honor succeed him."

In the mountains, a huge yeti is killed, but Friend has no interest in a dead specimen:

"Bring back a dead one! Have 'm pickle it, and write a lot of learned reports, stick its skeleton in a museum and call it something-or-other-Rollason-aursus... I'm gonna prove to 'em I can bring back the real thing."

One-by-one the members of the small team desert or die. Rollason, alone, wanders the frozen wastes, calling "Friend,

Friend." The doctor at last realizes the yeti have telepathic powers, oddly akin to the Lhama's uncanny intuition, and exploit each man's fear and guilt. His climactic meeting with a yeti utterly transforms him. Rollason remembers the Lhama's warning, and returns to the monastery, swearing yetis do not exist and are only a legend.

*Abominable Snowman* reversed a long degeneration in popular portrayals of evolution: a degeneration quite analogous to the evolutionary regression that concerned H. G. Wells. From his provocative novels of the 1890s to the horror classics of the 1930s to the schlock of the 1940s and 1950s, "evolution" had translated into mad doctors and ape-men primarily concerned with mayhem and mating.

Evolution at last hit the big time in 1960 in two highly successful movies. *The Time Machine* makes a few concessions to popular appeal (*Weena* is a beautiful woman, The Time Traveller turns crusader and vanquishes the Morlocks), but is otherwise a faithful version of Wells' novel. *Inherit The Wind*, a dramatization of the 1925 Monkey Trial, is the movies' first intelligent discussion of evolution. Hollywood's two *Jekyll & Hyde*, Fredric March and Spencer Tracy, debate brilliantly with dialogue based largely on the actual trial transcripts. The contest is definitely shaded towards the evolutionists, with Tracy's *Jekyll* humiliating March's *Hyde*.

Since 1960 evolution has been increasingly portrayed with more accuracy and diligence. But for many years Darwin's argument was advanced only by Mirakles and Moreau. Since the 1890s most young people's first exposure to the controversy over man's origins came not in church or school, but from Wells' novels and Hollywood horror. ■

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CULT MOVIES

# Our Man in Hell

Cutting, shooting, and dreaming  
the hypnotic cinema of

## Monte Hellman

For Monte Hellman's more Sisyphean characters, the road to hell is ultimately paved with indifference. Hellman the filmmaker, however, slips in through the back door as if he owned the place but wanted to show us a different entrance. The moniker chosen for his last name thus comes as no surprise.

From his early films directing Jack Nicholson to his influence and guidance on *Reservoir Dogs* as executive producer, Monte Hellman may not be as revered as the mesmerizing personalities with whom he has worked, but his mesmerizing work is revered throughout the cinema.

A career thus far book-ended by two low-budget, horror movies — the first for the exploitation franchise known as Roger Corman (*Beast From Haunted Cave*) and the second for arguably the most loathed franchise of the '80s and '90s (*Silent Night, Deadly Night III: Better Watch Out!*) — Hellman, nonetheless, has found the inclination to make some masterpieces in between. Or maybe he's simply pushed his rock to the top of the hill, only for it to roll back down, an existential feat of mythological proportions not just mirrored in his career, but also within the wide-open confines of his films.

Similar to how a simple, repetitive beat or riff in a song entrances the listener, Hellman manages to hypnotize his audience with the minimum of aesthetics: three people riding cross-country, a couple of cars, a couple of horses, a long, desolate road, little dialogue, not much plot. Yet, if you blink, you run the risk of overlooking the fleeting images realism slyly found within an existential narrative dealing with everyday, ordinary situations: GTO driving, wearing the same v-neck sweater throughout *Two-Lane*



Taylor and Bird share a typically tense, understated moment in Hellman's *Two-Lane Blacktop*

*Blacktop*, for example. His sweater's color changes from scene to scene, yet, we never see GTO change the sweater. This sublime subversion of reality and existence is at the heart of Hellman's most elliptical films, *The Shooting, Ride in the Whirlwind*, and *Two-Lane Blacktop*.

Whether completely man-made, as in black asphalt, or just simply a desert treaded on over and over again, the hot path to hell is burned on by the absurdities of everyday life. The only transcendence from the impending fate may be found in accepting the absurdity. In the case of the afore-

mentioned Sisyphean odysseys, all three manage to deconstruct the existential out of both the western and the road movie only to be reassembled with the pieces all mismatched. Thus, the western becomes more of a road movie, and the road movie becomes more of a western (it's no coincidence Harry Dean Stanton shows up in *Blacktop* hitchhiking in cowboy duds). In the process, however, both have been distilled down to their most common of denominators: a path and its travelers. Warren Oates, Miller Perkins, and Jack Nicholson head *The Shooting* (1966), but it

by Marvin Miranda

# Monte Hellman

might as well have been called *The Searchers*, albeit, stripped down and castrated (with Perkins outduking Wayne) by the socio-political atmosphere of the '60s, complete with its own Zapruder-inspired ending. Three Beckett characters in search of identity in an absurd landscape, certainly no longer Ford's wildly tamed territory, but rather, a brave new frontier heading in reverse, perhaps to the beginning (or the end – depending on your trust of the system) of all of our problems.

Both backed by Corman (again: the end of one era, the signaling of another), *The Shooting* was shot back to back with *Ride in the Whirlwind* (1966), which co-stars Nicholson (pulling double duty as writer), Perkins, and Cameron Mitchell standing in for Oates. Just as with its companion piece, Hellman eschews both Hollywood plot and western conventions in *Ride* for a more realistic, and, for that same reason, ironically sublime piece of Americana. This time around, it's *High Noon* turned inside out with the enclosed "outlaws" being persecuted and the arriving "law" doing the witch burning. For sure, not a reflection of the film's contemporary socio-political climate, but rather, a look back at the previous decade's lasting effect of McCarthyism and its unforeseeable push to do things outside the old Hollywood system.

Trade a couple of horses for a couple of cars five years later and you essentially have the same western, this time with a couple of non-acting cowboys: singer James Taylor as The Driver and drummer Dennis Wilson as The Mechanic (it doesn't get much more way-out-west than with Berkeley poster-boy, folk singing Taylor and Beach Boy Wilson), coupled with the man born to be a cowboy, Warren Oates, as GTO. Two years after *Easy Rider* and *The Wild Bunch* (both 1969 and coincidentally each co-starring Hellman regulars Nicholson and Oates, respectively), Hellman's *Two-Lane Blacktop* is what remained once the dust had settled after all the hoopla surrounding the arrival – by horse, by motorcycle – of the "New Hollywood."

(As if to make up for not being in his one time partner's road movie, Nicholson would star four years later in Antonioni's existential, identity-swapping car flick, *The Passenger*, an Italian "Nouvelle Vague à la Americain;" or rather, New Wave sensibilities arguably reinterpreted by the likes of American mavericks like Hellman.)

*Blacktop's* road is the one less-traveled, as Hellman trades in Beckett for Bresson, his characters no longer wondering, just

wandering down an existential highway to hell, or absurdity (same difference), where identity is switched like a sweater, the action is repeated ad infinitum, and the point, to quote another Hellman western, is that "There isn't any."

Just as with his films, I became enraptured during a recent conversation with the enigmatic director, editor, and subject of a new book, *Monte Hellman: His Life and Film*. The conversation mostly focused on a less-explored topic regarding Hellman's career: his experience as an editor and how that has shaped his career as a filmmaker.

**CM:** How did you end up an editor after directing theatre?

**MH:** I studied film at UCLA after I finished theater studies at Stanford. When I had an opportunity to get into the Editor's Guild, I felt it was a good stepping-stone to becoming a film director. Just because I directed some summer stock productions or little theatre productions in L.A., I didn't think that was going to allow me to suddenly become a movie director. I also realized editing was something I was attracted to. I discovered I had a knack for it when I was doing my studies. I just felt it was a great opportunity to really become an apprentice film editor and work my way up and be an editor, and then maybe, some day, I'd be a director.

**CM:** How did your affinity for editing come about?

**MH:** Well, for our final exam for the editing course I took at UCLA we were given reprinted dailies from *The Lady From Shanghai*, the scene with the mirrors, as if we were the original editor of the movie. We didn't have video at that time, or access to look at or copy what Welles edited together. We were simply told to put the scene together. I put it together and I thought I liked it better than the scene that was in the movie. I fell in love with editing then.

**CM:** How was it that the opportunity came to join the Editor's Guild?

**MH:** One of the members of my summer stock company was offered a job cleaning the film vaults at the American Broadcasting Company and he really wasn't interested. He knew I was interested in getting into film so he told me about it, and I went and applied for it and got the job and immediately had a terrible asthma attack because these vaults hadn't been cleaned in 50 years at that point. Within six months, I was sworn into the Editor's Guild and I got a job as an apprentice on the TV series *The Medic*.

**CM:** Do you think you would have been the same director you are now if you hadn't gone from directing theatre first to editing films?

**MH:** The pivotal thing for me was working with Bob Seiter, the first editor I edited with. His brother was William Seiter, the director. Bob was a magician. He had no respect for the physical film since it was just a work print. He would throw the film all over the place, step on it, stomp on it. It was my job to pick it up and put it back into shape. But watching him edit, I really saw how important the job of the editor is. I realized the combination of the film director and the editor equal the stage director. Those two jobs were taken on by the director on the stage because he was in control of both the performance and the timing. Basically, you know, the director has a lot to do with performance, obviously, in a movie. But so does the editor. I mean, the final performance is really fine-tuned by the editor.

Once I realized the importance of editing, I insisted, always, on editing my own movies. The one time I was not able to do it from the beginning was a situation in the Philippines where I did two pictures back-to-back, *Flight to Fury* and *Back Door to Hell*. Between pictures, I was hospitalized with some kind of strange tropical disease, and because they were under a time constraint, the picture was put into rough-cut by somebody else. That drove me crazy. I realized it wasn't enough for me to come in after somebody had assembled the picture, and then kind of play with it at that point. I had to work from the original dailies, choose the performances, do everything from the beginning, or I couldn't even look at it and know what to do with it from that point on. That followed through one time when I was brought in to recut some sequences in Peckinpah's *The Killer Elite*. He was not happy with the fight scenes. They had four editors working on it, besides myself, at the same time. So I said, I can't do it like this. You'll have to reprint all the dailies, and just give me the dailies, and let me start. I found that was the only way I could work.

**CM:** After just directing one film, *Beast From Haunted Cave*, you were dead set on editing.

**MH:** Absolutely. I'd already edited one picture. I was not allowed to edit *Beast From Haunted Cave*, however. It's the only film of mine I did not edit because the rule at the time – I don't know what the rule is now with the Editor's Guild – but you had to put in eight years in the Guild before you could edit. There were no exceptions. You didn't have to be working as an assistant during that time. You could get in the Guild, go to Hawaii, play on the beach for eight years, and then come back and you were an editor,

assuming somebody would hire you. I think I'd been in the Guild for four or five years by the time I directed *Beast*. So, I was not qualified to be a Guild editor on a union picture. You know, Roger [Corman] hired me thinking, "Wow, I can get you to write, direct and edit, all for the same price, what a bargain!" Then he was shocked to find out the Guilds wouldn't have it. For some reason this was a Guild picture. Roger never made Guild pictures. But that's what it was.

**CM:** Before you actually started taking courses on editing, were you at all conscious of the editing going on in movies?

**MH:** Until I began studying film, the history of film, reading about film and editing, and so forth, I really can't remember what my consciousness of movies was, other than as an emotional experience. I don't notice the editing unless I'm seeing a bad film. That's the way I am today. I don't watch a film and analyze it when I'm watching it. I basically have an experience, and that's what I want my audiences to do. I want them to give themselves over to the experience.

**CM:** What makes a bad movie, in terms of editing?

**MH:** Let me put it this way: If I notice the editing, it's a bad movie. If they're bad movies, you know, they're bad in every way, and the editing's bad. But there are occasionally movies where you can see where the editing, either by the editor or the director could have improved a picture. Although, I must say the films I really love I will watch many times, and when I watch a film over and over again, obviously, I begin to see everything, including the editing. But the first time I see it, I hope I don't notice things.

**CM:** Was there anything from editing for Corman such pictures as *Wild Angels* that helped you in the way you approached your material later on?

**MH:** It's funny, when it's not your own movie it's a different experience. I think a picture like *The Wild Angels*, one of the things that kind of comes to mind is that Roger shot so inexpensively and so quickly. He rarely did more than two takes, and frequently not more than one take. So, a lot of the problem of editing a picture like that is just trying to avoid having to use really bad performances, or things that are really awkward or something like that. It then really becomes a question of cosmetics in terms of making people unaware of the flaws in the picture, more than in the art of editing.

**CM:** Would that be something you would consider doing now?

**MH:** I've taken a lot of editing jobs and I think, if there's anything interesting in the material itself, I'm inclined to do it, just because I love it. I love editing.

**CM:** Are you willing to take on any project,



Millie Perkins in Heilmann's *The Shooting*.

just to see what you can do with it?

**MH:** I've regretted that a few times. I think if you're working with people who kind of let you do your thing, it can always be a good experience. But if it's difficult material or bad material and you're working with people who don't understand the problem and are trying to tell you how to do your job, then it becomes a difficult situation.

**CM:** How much of the final product can be attributed to either the director or editor, or both?

**MH:** It depends on the director. Some directors just don't have any clue as to what goes on in the cutting room. What they do is they'll come in and say I like it or I don't like it, and the editor will then fix it or else not be able to fix it. On the other hand, there are some directors who literally know what they want and tell the editor precisely what they want done and so forth. There are so many variations, you can go from a scale of zero to a hundred, a hundred different possibilities.

**CM:** Would you say the editor actually becomes a sort of "second director" on a particular film?

**MH:** Just judging from what I've observed, an editor like Walter Murch becomes a sort of second director on a movie.

**CM:** When you're editing your own films, how hard is it to cut down on footage you've directed?

**MH:** Since I started out as an editor before directing films, I haven't had a lot of problems with that, but it always helps to have somebody you can trust to be there with you. When I was doing *Two-Lane Blacktop*, I had Gary Kurtz, who had studied film at USC with Lucas and that group. He was

really invaluable. We had final cut with the provision that the picture had to be two hours or under. We ended up with a three and a half hour rough cut. So, we brought it down to two and a half hours and had a preview in San Diego. As a result of that preview, we cut it down to the two hours, meeting the contractual obligation. But then, on my own, because I wasn't satisfied with it, I cut out another fifteen minutes. I guess a lot of directors are not inclined to do that.

**CM:** Looking back now, do you think if you had kept x number of minutes on any one film, it would have made a different picture?

**MH:** There was only one film where they rejected my cut. That was *Flight to Fury*. They cut about ten minutes. When Jack Nicholson bought the rights and it was sold to Warner Bros., I put the 10 minutes back. On the other hand, Roger Corman took my cut and added five minutes to *Cockfighter*, and when we then sold it to television, or to video, they asked me to put it back. They wanted the director's cut, which was shorter. What Roger did is he added several dream sequences that had nothing to do with the movie, basically an excuse to put in car crashes and T&A. He cut a couple of things as well, which I put back in. It was all a matter of dollars and cents. The distributor wanted the scenes back in. They wanted the other ones cut out. Roger didn't care at that point, "Whatever the money guy wants, let him have what he wants since he's paying for it."

**CM:** Do you think one is able to recognize an editor's editing style?

**MH:** It's difficult, because if it's a strong director the director will have put his style

# Monte Hellman

on it. The editor is a member of the team. The editor is an element like the cinematographer. A good director will pick a team to fit his vision. You'll find that editors frequently keep working for the same director over and over again. So, if there's a consistency in style to the editor, it's probably because there's that consistency with the director and they, as a team, form that style.

**CM:** Can you tell us about some of your favorite collaborations as an editor?

**MH:** Working with Peckinpah was really interesting. We'd work terribly long hours, from nine in the morning until whenever he showed up to look at the day's work and give his comments, usually at ten or later that night. He was usually in really, really bad shape by then, because he had probably begun drinking at nine in the morning, or eleven, whenever he woke up. You would think he would be incapable of being really precise and insightful in his state. But nothing could be further from the truth. He was so amazing. He could barely walk, but he made you come up close because he spoke so softly, almost like a whisper, and he would have brilliant ideas. He taught me a tremendous amount about editing, just from that brief experience of working for him and doing a few scenes in *Killer Elite*.

**CM:** When you're taking on a job to re-edit a movie, are you consciously trying to make it a "better movie" or are you just doing a job?

**MH:** I do the same thing as I do for myself, which is, I try to get rid of everything I think is harmful to the movie. Sometimes the director may think it's an essential scene, let's say, and it can't be removed. In which case, you know, the director's the boss. What I try to do with myself – if I've made a mistake when directing the picture – is I try to get rid of that mistake, I try to make sure it's not in the movie. I may lose a scene that somebody else might think is crucial, but if I think it's a bad scene, I'll get rid of it.

**CM:** Does it become second nature to you to look at the dailies, and end up discarding some of the material before putting the movie together?

**MH:** I'll put everything together. I don't cut anything out before I assemble a rough cut. Anything the director shot will go in the movie. But, when I'm putting it together, I try to find a way to make it work. Sometimes, it's very difficult. Sometimes, some directors don't have a sense of a natural rhythm or a natural flow of things, and you can't create something that isn't there. If you're trying to create a naturalness and a rhythm and the material doesn't allow you to

do that, you can only work with what you have. With my own films as well. If I've made a serious mistake, I've got two choices. Either, again, get rid of it, or, if it's possible, go back and reshoot, and sometimes you realize a mistake on the set, even if you haven't begun to edit.

As both an editor and a director, you tend to start editing in your head. If you realize something doesn't work soon enough, sometimes you have the luxury of going back and reshooting it. I know there was a scene, in *China 9, Liberty 37*. I had an idea of how to do one scene and Giuseppe Rotunno, who was my cinematographer, who's brilliant, became as interested in doing the picture on schedule as he was on anything else. He would sometimes suggest things for the purpose of getting a scene done quickly when we were behind schedule. One time I took one of his suggestions, and then I slept on it, and I decided to reshoot the scene, because I'd realized it wasn't the editing effect I wanted.

**CM:** Under how much pressure is an editor to consider, let's say, an actor's performance or the cinematographer's scenes?

**MH:** Everybody has his own perspective and certainly, if you shoot four takes of a scene in the magic hour, or day for night, the cinematographer will do four takes knowing one of them will be perfect. That same take may not be the best take for the director, or it may not be the best take for the editor. So, again, the final arbiter is the director, obviously, and the director takes the editor's input, takes the cinematographer's input, but he has to make the final decision.

**CM:** How do you achieve saying so much with so little in your films, in terms of aesthetics and editing?

**MH:** I was tremendously influenced by a book written by a theatre director named Arthur Hopkins, who discovered Humphrey Bogart, Spencer Tracy, Katherine Hepburn, a lot of people. He basically believed nothing should be done just for the sake of doing it. Let's say, if you have four people sitting around a table playing cards, you don't inject movement just to inject movement. If they have to go to the bathroom, or answer the phone, there's a reason for somebody to move, otherwise, they just sit at the table. It just changed my whole way of looking at direction and making movies. I do nothing for the sake of doing it itself, other than trying to be as truthful and real as possible. The result is, you actually make the audience concentrate more, not less. When you have all these cuts, you interfere, you don't bring the audience closer, you push them further

away. I let the story itself, and the scene itself, dictate the editing. If it's not necessary to cut, I don't cut. When I know upfront I don't have a lot of plot driving the story, and it's basically the same scene from beginning to end – three people in a car or three people on horseback – the one thing I try to do is devise different angles, different ways of shooting those scenes, so it doesn't look like it's the same shot all the way through. I try to put as much variety into the way one scene differs from another scene throughout the movie. They're all essentially the same scene, but I try to find different ways to shoot it.

**CM:** Have you read Walter Murch's *In the Blink of An Eye*?

**MH:** I have both that book and the *The Conversations* and I browse them. I haven't read them cover to cover yet. I think the only book I remember reading on editing was Karel Reisz's book. I think it's just called *Editing*. I remember thinking, as I began editing my own films, and other people's films, how [the book's philosophy] was great in theory – and a lot of editors follow it, I guess – but it was something I couldn't follow, and I'll explain why. Reisz has certain rules regarding rhythm. An editor family friend and one of my mentors once came to see one of my movies, *China 9, Liberty 37*. He thought the editing was wonderful, but he said, "You break all the rules." The reason I break all the rules is because I don't follow any rules. What I do is I edit for performance, and so if the best performance in a scene is only in a long shot, I'll use it at that point, even if it doesn't follow the normal rules of progression of the scene. So he said my editing was totally unpredictable because of that. I think it turned out that way because, again, my primary focus became the performance. It's me returning to that theatre background.

**CM:** Murch suggests editing should be the most unnatural thing for us as human beings, since from the moment we wake up until the moment we go to bed, we are seeing one continuous, uninterrupted image.

**MH:** Usually, when I was a kid and I went to a movie, and someone would ask me afterwards what happened in the movie, I couldn't tell him because I didn't follow the plot. I was in a dream I was living, or co-living, with the movie itself, so that my dream was not exactly the movie, it was something stimulated by the movie. My personal way of looking at movies is that movies are a dream co-written between the film and the audience. Every member of the audience is going to come out of it having seen a slightly different movie, hopefully. It's what I hope to achieve. I think the cinema is an art form that was inevitable because of the fact we dream. ■

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shore retreats. Summer stock companies formed near resort areas frequented by vacationing New Yorkers, Bostonians and Philadelphians, offering repertory theatre from roughly July 4th through Labor Day. From the Green Mountains of Vermont to the Green Hills of Pennsylvania – from the Berkshires and Cape Cod in Massachusetts to the Hamptons in Long Island to the Finger Lakes of upstate New York – the companies played to audiences which were hardly unsophisticated. Productions generally were competent. As always, good actors outnumbered the available jobs in the troupes. Ticket prices were low: a season pass could be had for about a dollar per week.

Post-war summer stock proved a valuable training ground for countless young actors, among them Marlon Brando. It was also a lifeline to veteran Hollywood actors with good name recognition but a few years past their primes. Some repertory companies built their seasons around a procession of these "guest-stars." Well known actors – including Lugosi, Nigel Bruce and Arthur Treacher, Kay Francis and Ruth Chatterton, Jackie Cooper and Freddie Bartholomew, and many others – played the circuit, usually in the same role in the same play, but at a different location with a different cast each week. The resident company, while appearing with the current week's star in the evenings, rehearsed the next week's production during the day. The new guest-star would join the rehearsals on Monday morning, to be ready for the opening Monday or Tuesday night. Often the stars would arrive at the season's first play dates a week early, both to sharpen their skills in the roles that would carry them through the summer, and to kickoff their tour with public appearances and promos.

Lugosi worked the summer stock circuit in 1947, 1948 and 1949, alternating between *Dracula* and *Arsenic & Old Lace* across Connecticut, Massachusetts, upstate New York and Pennsylvania. As he toured, he occasionally crossed paths with his old costars and friends from Hollywood. In 1947 in Litchfield, Connecticut, he closed in *Dracula* the day before John Carradine opened with *Hamlet*. In 1949, Lugosi arrived in Fayettleville, New York a week early in July to vacation with wife Lillian and son Bela, Jr. and with his friend from his Hungarian days, Oscar-winning actor Paul Lukas. Lukas was then playing in Fayettleville; he moved on the next week as Lugosi played in *Arsenic & Old Lace*. Nineteen forty-nine was the only year that Bela, Jr. joined his parents on the summer

stock circuit, but Lillian was always at her husband's side.

The Lugosis spent most of the summer of 1950 in pre-Broadway tryouts of a new play, *The Devil Also Dreams*. That play never made it to the Great White Way, but from mid-July to late August, Lugosi consistently earned praise as Petofy, a wacky butler whose bumbling foils his boss' murder plot. Petofy was a small role – perhaps a late addition to strengthen the play's draw, for Lugosi began the 1950 season as he had the previous three years, in summer stock.

\* \* \*

Bela, a few months shy of turning 68, and Lillian arrived in Winona on June 29 to attend a reception marking the start of St. Michael's Playhouse's fourth season. The only photo yet found of Lugosi's week in Vermont is from that reception, appearing in the *Burlington Free Press* on July 1 (not of sufficient quality in the aged microfilm to reproduce here). It shows a Lugosi much heavier and more robust than the rather frail and older-looking man who would play Petofy only a few weeks later. The sole reviewer in the Burlington papers even made passing mention of Lugosi's weight. Since at least the mid-1940s, Lugosi had occasional bouts of ill-health that could cause wide swings in his apparent weight (and necessitated his taking painkillers so as to be able to work). But Lugosi, temporary girth or not, was in good form on June 29 – the newspaper photos show him charming two young women while the rest of the cast poses for a group photo. Wynn Casey, a broadcaster with WJOY, the local ABC radio affiliate, interviewed both Lugosis. Lillian's interview aired in a July 6 segment titled "Living with Lugosi." Whether Lugosi recorded "Cask of Amontillado" for rival station WCAX or simply left a copy of an existing recording is unknown. The previous October Lugosi had appeared in a televised version of the Poe story, and may have cut the record then. If or when WCAX aired "Cask of Amontillado" is not known.

*Dracula* rehearsals probably began in Winona before the Lugosis' arrival. Bela joined them on Friday June 30 and worked through the weekend. Rehearsals went late into Monday night as the complex lighting cues were perfected. The play requires Dracula to vanish almost before the audience's eyes. The effect had to be precisely executed, otherwise the vampire would still be onstage as the sun rose (thus ending his existence a few scenes too early).

The efforts paid off, at least for Milton Slater, the *Free Press*' critic. In a July 5 review entitled "Patrons of Opening Week at Playhouse Icily Thrilled; Mr. Lugosi Sees To That," Slater thought the script too "flabby"

and the leading lady too emotional; but generally praised the performance. "But this is almost eclipsed by the Lugosi personality itself," wrote Slater:

"A quality of unreality, an animated ferociousness and a fluidity of motion which is arresting. Intoning all his lines in mettuscular fashion, Mr. Lugosi's rich voice is sent scattering from a mobile face, which contorts in such variety, guaranteed to raise the hackles. The actor, although balking large, moves with cat-like grace and manipulates his cape in the second act in a way which would put [a] bull-fighter to shame."

Lugosi's detractors often describe his *Dracula* as stylized and static. As Slater's review and others from the 1940s and from Britain in 1951 attest, he was a dynamic presence before the footlights, and varied his *Dracula* performances to suit his whim or his reading of an audience. John Maher, producer of the 1951 British *Dracula*, once told me that, though he initially had doubts on first seeing the aged, stooped actor, when Lugosi played the role "he looked 40 again, erect and towering. He had this twinkle in his eye. He was so charming, and then so evil. It was magnificent."

\* \* \*

As *Dracula* played at night, the St. Michael's company spent its days rehearsing its next offering, *Arsenic & Old Lace*. This production would have no guest star, and St. Michael's director, Eliot Duvey, played the villainous Jonathan Brewster, a part that Lugosi had played many times. Perhaps Lugosi originally planned to play two weeks in Winona, a week in each of his summer stock vehicles, but pulled out when *The Devil Also Dreams* beckoned. Nothing in the newly uncovered information gives any clue on this possibility, or whether Lugosi gave a few tips to Duvey on playing Brewster.

The actor must have gone into rehearsals for *The Devil Also Dreams* soon after his Vermont *Dracula*. That play opened on July 24, 1950 in Somerset, Massachusetts. It played Rochester, Fayettleville, Toronto and Ottawa before closing in Montreal on August 26. *The Devil Also Dreams* was Lugosi's last real chance at returning to Broadway.

\* \* \*

A complete listing of Lugosi's 818 performances in Deane & Baldwin's *Dracula* can be found at <http://www.cultmoviesperspective.com>, along with some of Frank's other Lugosi and movie writings, and information on his two books, *Vampire Over London - Bela Lugosi in Britain* and *A Quaint & Curious Volume of Forgotten Lore - The Mythology & History of Classic Horror Films*.)



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